

Solomon Katz





# MARCUS AURELIUS



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*Published by George Allen & Unwin Ltd.*

THE UNKNOWN CROMWELL  
PROFESSIONALISM AND ORIGINALITY

---

EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION OF CRITICISM  
THE LESSON IN APPRECIATION  
MENTAL TRAINING AND EFFICIENCY  
THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS OF RECONSTRUCTION  
DEMOCRACY AND THE PRESS  
A FOURTH (ETC.) BOOK OF CELEBRATIONS





### MARCUS AURELIUS SHOWING MERCY

The compassion shown in the face and gesture of Marcus suggests and justifies the title of this book. The bas-relief is on the triumphal arch erected in 176 A.D. in honour of the conquest of the Northern tribes. Two captives receive the Emperor's mercy.

MARCUS AURELIUS  
A SAVIOUR OF MEN  
*SIXTEENTH EMPEROR OF ROME*

*by*

F. H. HAYWARD

D.LIT., M.A., B.Sc.

*Author of "The Unknown Cromwell," etc.*

*Save men. Life is short. This only  
is the harvest of earthly existence, a  
righteous disposition and social acts.*

MARCUS AURELIUS

LONDON  
GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD  
MUSEUM STREET

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1935

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UNWIN BROTHERS LTD., WOKING

## EPICUREAN AND STOIC

ΑΗ, Lucian [of Samosata], we have need of you, of your sense and of your mockery! Here, where faith is sick and superstition is waking afresh; where gods come rarely and spectres appear at five shillings an interview; . . . and philosophy cries aloud in the market place, and clamour does duty for government, and Thais and Lais are names of power—here, Lucian, is room and scope for you. . . . Still our Peregrinus, and our Peregrina too, come to us from the East. . . . Like your Alexander [of Abonoteichus], they deal in marvels and miracles, oracles and warnings. . . . Even your ignorant Bibliophile is still with us. . . . Yes, Lucian, we are the same vain creatures . . . that you knew, and at whom you smiled. Nay, our very social question is not altered. . . . “There is but one way to Corinth,” as of old, but which that way may be, oh master of Hermotimus, we know no more than he did of old; and still we find, of all philosophies, that THE STOIC ROUTE IS MOST TO BE RECOMMENDED.

ANDREW LANG

He [Marcus Aurelius] made bad men good and good men very good.

CAPITOLINUS

σῶζε ἄνθρώπους. βραχὺς ὁ βίος. εἰς καρπὸς τῆς  
ἐπιγείου ζωῆς, διὰθεσις ὁσία καὶ πράξεις κοινωνικαί.

*Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, VI, 30

(For translation see title-page)

THE Author wishes to express to the Editors of the Loeb Classical Library (published by William Heinemann) his thanks for their permission to quote extensively from their editions of *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* and of the *Correspondence of Fronto*, both edited by Dr. C. R. Haines; also to Messrs. Macmillan & Co. for permission to quote rather extensively from Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*.

The quotations from Lucian are taken from the Clarendon Press edition (Fowler).

The author wishes to state, as an inspector of schools, that any opinions he expresses are not necessarily shared by educational authorities, administrative or advisory.

He thanks his colleague, Mr. J. B. Cryer, for kindly revising the proof-sheets.

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## P R E F A C E

THE confession, discreet or indiscreet, which I prefaced to my *Unknown Cromwell* (1934), I repeat in the present case: "I am not a professional historian, and such specialization as is mine lies elsewhere." And even if I could claim to be a specialist student of seventeenth-century England, the probability of my being also a specialist student of second-century Imperial Rome would be slight. I am, in fact, neither; and I must add that the writing of biographies, except of the simple fifteen-minute kind demanded for Memorial Celebrations, will not be the task of the closing decade or decades of my life.

Education, not history and not biography, has long been my interest and my business. In particular, I have been hunting during thirty years for a solution of what has notoriously been regarded as a certain "difficulty" in schools, as well as of certain cultural and civic "difficulties" allied to it. That in the spirit of Comte, and indeed under his direct influence, I am an advocate, in schools and out of schools, of Celebrations of Great Men as well as of Great Ideas and Great Institutions, in the hope that such Assembly Methods, with their mass emotion and broad impressions and an occasional touch of splendour, will be of help in these times of spiritual unsettlement and distress, explains in a measure why I have twice been drawn away from my chosen task to the writing of biography. If myself an educational Jack-of-all-trades, there is one school subject which, as a parson in disguise—rather thick disguise,—I am bound

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to stress, namely, this subject of "great lives." Any system of Culture, Education, or Religion which cannot find an honoured and eminent place for heroic and saintly men of all creeds seems to me to be failing the world. Inspiring biographies may, to some considerable extent, fill the gap left by the decay, whether temporary or permanent, of religious faith; and by inspiring biographies I mean such as make the best of human nature while not suppressing the record of its weaknesses. There are, indeed, thoughtful students who hold that the English national genius turns more readily to concrete examples than to abstract principles; that the Englishman's ideas are "not ideas properly speaking," as Senor Madariaga says; if so, biography may well become the basis of that Religion of the Future which seems so long in arriving. The relation of biography to a doctrine of the Holy Spirit is obvious.

I do not claim that Marcus Aurelius is a suitable theme for schools. He is a man for the middle-aged if not the elderly, and it is probably they who have always loved him most. But I claim that somewhere in our system of Culture, or chaos of Culture, he should have his place; whereas actually, except in the hearts of a few lovers, he has none. Why is this?

Apart from the fact that, writing in Greek and many years after the Caesar and Virgil period, he has not been made into a *corpus vile* by classical schoolmasters, he shares with most of the other exponents of pagan ethics the neglect that has been consequent upon the dominance of Christianity. Born about the time of Plutarch's death, he could not, of course, be included in the *Lives*, but even if he had been included in some

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appendix to that splendid book of civics, his luck would have been no better, for the *Lives* have rarely been used for a century past in any of our educational or religious institutions. Such a lopsidedness in our arrangements not only falsifies history but involves the neglect of a man who has more spiritual nourishment for adult minds than almost any other writer on record.

Though the Church is naturally not keen to do justice to paganism, it would be unfair to accuse her of ignoring Marcus simply because he was an alleged "persecutor of the Christians"; the truth is that the Church, and her factotum the school, has made little use of the entire mass of civic thought and example supplied by Greece and Rome, the only important exception being that which has come from Aristotle by way of St. Thomas Aquinas. Anyhow, the resultant loss is great. In facing, as the world is facing to-day, vast problems of domestic, civic, national, and international kinds, one is astonished that this rich mine has been so little worked. Mr. Belloc, occasionally romantic, spoke the simple unromantic truth when he said, in *Danton*, "There is something in the Church which neglects, if it does not despise, civic ideals." The main reason for this he does not mention; the early Church had little interest in civic affairs owing to her expectation of an immediate Second Coming of Christ, an expectation which, in my opinion, disposes once and for all of the Catholic view that Christ established plainly and unmistakably an institution designed for permanence.

But the Stoics had rather more time ahead (though even they looked forward to a cataclysm), and they had more of the Greek city spirit in them than the Early

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Christians. And if ever a man was in possession of a splendour of civic and moral ideas that man was the ruler of the Roman Empire from A.D. 161 to 180. Like Cromwell, perhaps, his was not an original mind in the sense of being richly fertile of ideas; he laments towards the end his lack of mere cleverness; and certainly his civic and moral ideas can be largely traced to Epictetus and others. But in nearly all the spiritual qualities on which the Christian Church at her best has laid stress (all of them at any rate except Joy), as well as many others which the Church has unhappily left alone, Marcus is supreme, and the fact that he was a "persecutor" should hardly make him a stranger to a Christian civilization, though it may add to the irony of the situation with regard to the relations between himself and the Church. It is this very "persecutor" who helps and shames us grown men in our little daily efforts to be patient with "the busy-body, the thankless, the unneighbourly," and the rest of the annoying tribe that we know so well; who checks our tongue a little when the easy retort, fatal to peace, is waiting on the tip; who, calling to us, "Let others say or do what they will, I for my part . . .," stifles the spirit of censoriousness as it swells up like a devil within; nay, who bids us scrutinize evil men themselves with a glass that is nearly opaque to all rays except the good and is splendidly generous in its magnifications; and to do this on the chance, nay, in the almost assured hope, that, as we thus patiently scrutinize, we shall catch sight of something which may be called the divine.

We are told by the men of the "Oxford Group" that an even more joyous attitude comes to those who have

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responded to the call of Dr. F. N. D. Buckman, himself echoing the call of Christ. By an absolute surrender of one's secret sin, a frank confession of it to one's comrades, and a real willingness to help them and all men to the uttermost (Perfect Honesty, Perfect Purity, . . .), one finds oneself no longer a double and harassed being, seeking vainly and miserably to serve two masters, but a unified and liberated being, feeling and radiating Joy and Charity and Inspiration. If this blessed state is not ours, the reason is that in our hearts we have not desired it *enough*; we have not "hungered and thirsted" after goodness but, pretending to ourselves, have really loved our besetting sin all the time.

There may be a good deal in this; Joy of heart and Graciousness of conduct sometimes follow what is called conversion; indeed, unless, sooner or later, they follow it, one may doubt the reality of the process. We miss this note of Joy, except at rare moments, in the adult Marcus, though we catch it at times in that earlier Marcus who, I hope, will become better known to the reader after the reading of this very book, the youthful friend, assistant, and admirer of Antoninus Pius. He had it once, though it was no Christian Joy, and it faded to a wistful memory as the years crowded on. But though Joy is less present with Marcus than we should wish, Graciousness is eminently and always there, abundant, unfailing; never, indeed, was a man so consistently gracious. To say that never man loved his fellows more bountifully would not perhaps be true, for Love is infused with a greater measure of Joy than Marcus could ordinarily summon up; but never man tried harder to love, and even to love the unworthy. Therefore to learn that he was a "per-

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secutor of the Christians," themselves competitors for the prize of Love, Joy, and Grace, is to be face to face with one of the ironies of history.

How far Marcus was actually a persecutor will be discussed in its place. But the Loeb edition of the *Meditations* throws a new, suggestive, and very happy light if not on this question at least on the personal feelings of Marcus towards the Christians. If Dr. C. R. Haines is right, the supposed references in the *Meditations* to their "obstinacy" (*παράραξις*) do not bear the contemptuous interpretation commonly accepted; rather the opposite.

Though, as I have said, I am merely an educationist who takes a rather wider view of what Education involves than many people, a curious neglect on the part of contemporary writers may allow me to make some definite additions to the common knowledge of Marcus Aurelius.

For in point of fact, the life of Marcus, as distinct from his book of *Meditations*, is surprisingly little known. His fate in this respect resembles that of a very different man, Samuel Pepys. By committing their secret thoughts to books of intense though unintended interest for mankind, both men were enemies to their own formal biographical renown; when their names are mentioned we think of the books, not of the two men making history, being educated, engaged in public administration, or facing death.

A full-length biography of Pepys is, I understand, coming from the pen of the historian of Charles II. This fact was not the "only begetter," nor indeed the begetter at all, of the present work, and I do not wish to illumine

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my austere pages by establishing comparisons with the salacious and other glories which may shine from the story of Pepys. But the similarity of the two cases supplies me with at least one excuse for attempting a *Life of Marcus*. The field of Antonine biography is as empty as the field of Cromwellian biography is crowded. Only one *Life*, apart from those prefaced to editions of the *Meditations*, is well known, that of Mr. C. Clayton Dove (pub. Watts & Co., 1930). It is both scholarly and vivid, but, having been written in independence of the Loeb volumes, takes a different view of the authenticity of certain letters, and accepts anti-Faustinian scandals (and others) freely. I am not competent to judge of the former question, but I recommend readers to study Mr. Dove's book while recognizing that my authorities are the Loeb volumes.

Dr. Haines has helped to clear up other points than the one mentioned above. The *Correspondence* of Fronto with his famous pupils, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, and with their "father" Antoninus Pius, was edited by him a few years ago for the Loeb Series. These Fronto volumes, with their priceless information about the young Marcus, seem to be very little known, and it is their comparative neglect which has helped to justify me in the present attempt. Fragments of the Fronto correspondence had, of course, long been familiar to the classical public—a number are appended to the Everyman edition of the *Meditations*, and Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* shows a knowledge of it—but there was no complete English translation anywhere available. I have gladly used Dr. Haines's work as well as his edition of the *Meditations*; these three volumes, the *Meditations* and the



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two Fronto volumes, are referred to and quoted from on almost every page of the present work.\*

One very lengthy section has been quoted *en bloc* (Chapter V), namely the description of Antoninus Pius by his adoptive son and successor. To break up this lovely eulogy into fragments, or to attempt to paraphrase or summarize it, would be an offence against taste, common sense, and justice. It is one of the noblest products of the human spirit, and needs to be accepted and revered as an undivided whole.

Dr. Haines's edition of the *Correspondence* performs another service. He has placed among forgeries the letters of Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius relative to Avidius Cassius, letters which made Lucius Verus convey a wise warning to Marcus and the latter foolishly refuse it, thus causing Merejkowski, Petersen, and some other moderns to discount the sagacity of our hero. On these grounds of diction these letters are now rejected, and the second blot is removed from the fair fame of Marcus Aurelius.

The three said Loeb volumes do not themselves supply a history of the reign of Marcus Aurelius; but fortunately the figure of the good emperor attracted a reasonable amount of attention from certain Roman historians, though I understand that the qualifications of these particular writers are not usually accounted high. Thus if my account of the campaigns of Marcus is unsatisfactory and a few dates are wrong to the extent of two or three years, the fault, I fear, is partly with the destructive

\* When references like "XII, 30" or "I, *Fronto*, 7," occur, they mean "Book Twelve of the *Meditations*, Section 30," and "Vol. One of the *Correspondence*, page 7," both in the Loeb Series.

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activities of Time and partly with the original historians, who even leave it in dispute whether Marcus died on the Danube or on the Save, at Vienna or at Mitrovitz.

In this connection, too, a matter of even greater importance has to be left uncertain, namely, the question whether Marcus took his own life. I have arrayed the evidence on this topic and it will be found to point in the affirmative direction; but suicide, for a Stoic, had different associations from those which have surrounded it since the establishment of Christianity.

I cannot conclude this Preface without a reference to a couple of books of fiction or semi-fiction devoted to Marcus Aurelius. The most recent is Nis Petersen's *Street of the Sandalmakers*. There is nothing surprising in the fact that the Danish author is unacquainted with the suggestions contained in the Loeb editions. Petersen's book deals more with the *times* of the emperor than with his personality and thoughts; Marcus moves very much in the background; he escapes our real scrutiny and could be absent from the book without loss.

In a sense this is as it should be. The *Meditations* were unpublished in the emperor's reign, were indeed never intended for publication at all and were not even in existence until towards the end of his life. It is true that he gave certain public lectures of a summarizing and valedictory kind, and his philosophical affinities were no secret. But his inner thoughts and feelings must have been unknown to most men except so far as they were expressed in such details of his conduct as his immense patience under affliction and his unfaltering fidelity to the calls of military duty on the frontier; to this extent certainly he was "known by his fruits" as surely as the

best of Christians could be. In the last few years, moreover, he became the object of intense affection when the coming accession of Commodus began to present itself in vivid and rather dreadful colours to the imagination of the Romans.

The following passage is about the best that Petersen can do for our present purpose, and it doubtless represents with tolerable accuracy the verdict of the Roman populace on their ruler. Marcus is away, facing the peril from which the "Miracle of the Thundering Legion" delivered him. The Christian priest is speaking:—

"The Emperor, . . . we cannot do without him. If Commodus succeeds Rome becomes a slough of misery."

"But the Christians will be better off."

"Rather evil days under Marcus Aurelius than good days under Commodus."

And it really looked as if one could not do without the derided and beloved prince. "Old bent head," the Emperor was called. "Pious old woman," Avidius Cassius had mocked him, and the Emperor heard it and forgot it the same day. "Cuckold," crowed Marullus rapturously from his perch in the Marcelline Theatre, and "Cuckold" the echo crowed back a thousandfold from the Danube to the Tigris. And the Emperor heard this too, and he raised as answer his wife's reputed lovers to brilliant positions. For he really *was* pious, and perhaps all the rest; but, if his head was bowed and he had cold feet, suffered from gout, and was a bit hen-pecked, he did not greatly trouble Rome with these deviations from conventional grim manliness. While the mockers took their ease at home, he was in the outlying parts of the empire with the legions—with his gout, his cold feet, and his troublesome and adored wife, chastising the enemies of the State. They, too, learned to know his amazing self-restraint. Them, too, he forgave after punishment. "We ourselves are beasts that slay and eat," he said, with his melancholy

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calm. But he did not kill unnecessarily and never ate for enjoyment's sake. "We have nothing, nothing at all, to glory in," he admitted, and no one gave him any particular glory. People dwelt rather on his peculiarities, but mostly as one dwells on the peculiarities of the head of the family. . . . He was the father of them all, the responsible one, for whom mockery and taunts were but the expression of childishness and cruelty. But he held the Christians in contempt.

Now, as I have hinted, the word "contempt" may, with the assistance of Dr. C. R. Haines, be expunged in favour of some such phrase as "shy admiration for their unreasoning obstinacy and conscientiousness." I have dealt with this question in the following pages.

The other chief matter referred to in the above quotation is the character of the Empress Faustina. There seems much doubt about the truth of the charges insinuated against her and echoed in Swinburne's poem *Faustine*:

You could do all things but be good  
Or chaste of mien;  
And that you would not if you could,  
We know, Faustine. . . .

Not godless, for you serve one God,  
The Lampsacene,  
Who metes the gardens with his rod;  
Your lord, Faustine.

If one should love you with real love  
(Such things have been,  
Things your fair face knows nothing of,  
It seems, Faustine); . . .

and so on through forty-one stanzas.

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If the reader prefer this theory of *guilt* (it is well set forth in Mr. Dove's *Life of Marcus*) he must realize what he is in for. The scandal-mongers represent Faustina not as a woman who was frail once or twice, but as one who, in her forties, would publicly linger on the beach at Cajeta to select a paramour from among half-naked sailors and gladiators. Marcus, meanwhile, was not merely forgiving but *infinitely* forgiving, on the principle that bad people must be *expected* to be bad, and that his duty was not to resent badness but to be kind at all costs. (See passage quoted from the *Meditations* on page 217 and twenty similar ones.) Now this explanation *does* meet the case as simply stated, for Marcus was probably the most compassionate person in history. But it meets the case at the expense of his "Verissimus" reputation. Could he, with his notorious sincerity and truthfulness, have sanctioned the blasphemous farce of the posthumous praise and deification of Faustina if women of the streets, selling themselves for bread, were vestal virgins compared with her? Was he the man to let religion and decency be dragged in the dust by the public proclamation of, in effect, a monstrous lie? Was he, at best, *staging Forgiveness* as blatantly as Peregrinus had *staged Contempt of Death*, knowing all the time that the Roman world would be transformed by his act into a theatre rocking with laughter and derision? (That laughter, by the way, does not seem to have arisen: the world revered Marcus more and more.) I prefer a more likely interpretation and one more generous to the heart of the daughter of Antoninus Pius and to the head of Marcus Aurelius.

The one puzzling thing is what has puzzled the world

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for centuries, namely, the character of Commodus, and I shall suggest that it was the early conceived fears, well justified by later events, about the unworthy son of Marcus, which more than anything else gave the scandal-mongers their chance. But, after all, the *Correspondence* and the *Meditations* are first-hand documents, and their evidence is more to the point than the licensed buffoonery of any Marullus in the Marcelline Theatre, just as the *Letters* of Cromwell are more to be regarded than the malicious gossip of Royalist scribblers. If Faustina was the mother of Commodus (whose busts show his Antonine paternity in unmistakable fashion) she was also the mother of the martyred Cornificia and of that Arria Fadilla whose daughter the first Gordian was proud to have married. She was mother, likewise, of seven other children, all acknowledged as princes or princesses of the Antonine house, a puzzling achievement for a supposedly profligate woman in an age when birth control was far from unknown. Whatever may be the mysteries of dysgenics in the case of Commodus, I prefer the praises of Faustina by her father and husband to the irresponsible slanders of the baser elements of Roman society, who saw adulteries and poisonings everywhere; and I suggest that in her case the common process by which an eminently virtuous man is given by legend an exceptional birth has been applied and reversed in explanation of the viciousness of Commodus; it is a kind of *post eventum* prophecy. Contemporary comedians might insinuate and later scribblers might echo the insinuations, but these things are not evidence.

Apart from these two important points, *The Street of the Sandalmakers* gives, I imagine, a tolerably true im-

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pression of the times of Marcus Aurelius. We catch echoes of the coming to Rome of Montanist Christianity, with its craving for martyrdom—the thing which may have bewildered and fascinated (as well as alienated) Marcus. We see the worship of Isis and her infant son in full swing—the worship which, a couple of centuries later, was embodied in Christianity under another name. We see the philosophers of the Cynic School carrying the tenets of Stoicism a stage further and acting as father-confessors and death-bed advisors. We see the Plague entering Rome with the returning army of Lucius Verus, we see the impostures of Alexander of Abonoteichos, and we catch glimpses of Galen, Apuleius, and Lucian.

But the theme of my book is Marcus himself rather than his age, and here, except for a few references in the text and footnotes, I say good-bye to *The Street of the Sandalmakers*.

Marcus is more personally prominent in the masterpiece of Walter Pater, though even here our glimpses of him are all too scanty. Marius the Epicurean, it is true, visits Marcus the Stoic Emperor on the Palatine. We are told\* that, almost unguarded, as was the wont with Antoninus before him, Marcus seemed surrounded nevertheless by a strange halo, as both pontiff by office and saint by character; and though slander was at work in the world outside, his family, including Faustina and the young Commodus, was freely spoken of as the “holy” or “divine” house. And to Marius the Epicurean (or at least to Walter Pater his biographer) Faustina was no ugly woman, as in Petersen’s novel, but “the most beautiful woman in the world, who was also the great

\* Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*.

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paradox of the age." I agree that she was a paradox indeed if, though among the most charming wives and devoted mothers in history, she was the loose woman of the gossips.

Perhaps the most touching episode in Pater's book is the story of the death of the prince Annius Verus, born a little after Commodus and living only for some six or seven years. Pater's account of the funeral of the junior Emperor Lucius Verus is also of interest: both episodes are reproduced in this book. Such glimpses are the best contribution of *Marius the Epicurean* to the present subject; and I would add, for the benefit of the inexperienced reader and in my best schoolmasterish manner, the simple but I believe rather necessary warnings that Marius was not Marcus, and that Marcus was not an Epicurean but a Stoic; and also that Lucius Verus was not Lucian of Samosata.

But whatever value my book may be judged to possess will be mainly due to its employment of the three Haines volumes and the authentic words of Marcus. In using this material I have sought to give a picture of the inner spirit of a man who, in the opinion of many students, corresponds more closely to our conception of flawless and angelic virtue than almost any other in history. My chief regret is that I have not been able, in view of the limitations of my plan, to quote more freely. That plan was to write a *Life of Marcus*, not to expound or to edit the *Meditations*.

F. H. H.

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# MARCUS AURELIUS

## CHAPTER I

### A PAGAN THANKSGIVING

was somewhere about A.D. 174, and on the banks of Danube, or of its Moravian tributary the Gran, or its Croatian tributary the Save (date and place are not certain as we should wish), that a Roman Emperor, generalissimo, bearing a face that has a strange familiarity and suggestiveness, began to write the Most Beautiful Thanksgiving in Literature, a Thanksgiving so sober, more sedate, less exuberant than the *gnificats* and *Psalms of Praise* of Church or Bible, or *Canticle of the Sun* of St. Francis, but more intimate, many ways more practical, and far more unexpected and amazing; a Thanksgiving not for deliverance out of danger, or for the exaltation of this nation or that, but for the exemplary goodnesses of contemporary men; a Thanksgiving that ultimately passed into one for the opportunities of life and even (here anticipating the *canticle* itself) the virtues of death. A man who, after having made his own life a continuous opportunity for goodness, and after deliberately scanning men in order to note not their faults but even their smallest excellences, would see in the loss of life an opportunity to prevent a small and improbable failure, crying to Death, "Tarry, lest peradventure I forget myself" (IX, 3), had already raised Thanksgiving to a height scarcely attained

by any other man in history. *The Most Beautiful Thanksgiving in Literature.*

To many readers, especially perhaps in England, the full beauty of it has not been apparent. The later books of the *Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* may be endured or even admired, but the opening paragraphs are repellent. "From X [I learnt] a kindly disposition and sweetness of temper. From Y . . . modesty and manliness. . . . From Z . . . to live the simple life."

And so the long record continues: "Ten times too long; a bore, . . . a prig, . . . man full of spiritual pride," comments the cynic, the sceptic, the believer. And though the note changes in Book II, and Marcus, instead of bragging of his own virtues now concerns himself with the failings of mankind and the call to avoid them, the alteration is only slightly for the better. We feel ourselves in the presence of a pedagogue, though, to do the man justice, he seems conscious towards the end that this is the unfortunate impression he conveys. He seems to confess to a certain dullness, a certain schoolmasterishness (X, 36).

But our resentment is a tragic mistake, a complete topsyturvydom on our part. We have confused absolute opposites; spiritual pride with spiritual humility, exhortation by Marcus of others with monitions by Marcus addressed to himself. Perhaps Walter Pater by embodying some of the *Meditations* in a speech of Marcus, has helped the confusion. We have missed the point of it all, and have forgotten that the book was written for the author's own eyes and not for the eyes of other men. The very title bears its evidence. It is not really *Meditations*, or *Thoughts*; still less is it *Exhortations*; it is "*To Himself.*"

## *A Pagan Thanksgiving*

"Judge not," Christ had said a century and a half before. Not only did Marcus Aurelius obey that command, though knowing nothing of its authorship, he went still further and changed it into something astonishingly positive. It is as if a judge, to whom the monition had sounded like a divine thunder-clap, were to stop his sentencing, defy all precedent, and astonish his court by pointing out the virtues of the jurymen, the barristers, and lastly the accused. Except in a lack of passionate devotion to a person, the teachings of Marcus are, in fact, more Christian than Christianity, and perhaps "it is to him, rather than any Christian potentate, that we must look for an example of [the danger of] applying the gospel maxims [too unreservedly] to the business of the troubled world." However that may be, in the astonishing First Book of the *Meditations* Marcus gazed back upon his forbears and round upon his tutors and other contemporaries in order to dig out what good might possibly be found in them worthy of special record, remembrance, and imitation. When he speaks of "kindly disposition," "sweetness of temper," and the rest, he is not cataloguing his own achieved virtues; he is enumerating the virtues he could discern in men who were all (except one, perhaps) far inferior to himself. Where can be found in literature or history another case of such an elaboration of humility, generosity, and inspired research? Most men who have achieved a successful life will offer a tardy tribute, mixing sentiment with criticism, to some deceased parent or schoolmaster; but what man in his fifties, amid toils and cares innumerable, will retire into his chamber (or, as perhaps with Marcus, his tent) in order to make a full, systematic,

and thankful enumeration, *not for publication but for private reminder and consolation and self-improvement*, of the qualities of goodness in the people he has known?

Marcus did not, in fact, use our offensive and bracketed words "*I learnt*" at all. He was not the man to say even to himself that he had learnt, that he had achieved, the moral excellences which he recorded. He was summoning up all his waning powers in order, quite late in life, to begin the task afresh of making himself a good man; and what better way to this could be found than to remind himself that others before him had achieved so much goodness, and goodness in such varied forms? He anticipated Livingstone's discovery that "there are vast numbers of good people in the world," and this goodness of other men, discovered as a result of deliberate analysis and laborious recollection, almost dazzled (for once) his eyes. "How beautiful mankind is!" cried Miranda. Marcus knew that mankind was not all beautiful, but on principle he was now seeking for whatever moral beauty was there, and if we are to judge from the *Meditations* he had been thrilled and surprised at the amount. That surprise he may transmit to us, long familiar with the stories, true but not the whole truth, of the corruptions of pagan society in the last centuries of Rome.

"From X [I received an impression of] a kindly disposition and sweetness of temper. From Y [one of] modesty and manliness. From Z [the example of] the simple life."

Appreciation and generosity assumed, in fact, a gleaming splendour in the book that has been sometimes called the *Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius*. It is a shining, golden book not only of Thanksgiving, but of Thanks-

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giving pursued as a happy duty and raised to the *nth* power by the most generous-minded man, perhaps, of whom we have any considerable record.

"But," it may be said, "there were evil people in his world however conscientiously Marcus averted his eyes from badness and focussed them on goodness."

History shows that indeed there were; Juvenal was industriously flogging the vices of Rome when Marcus was a young man. The fact remains that Marcus has no word of personal reproach for his colleague the weak co-emperor, for his son, for his wife, or for any of the courtiers, officials, or soldiers around him. Certainly the historians have little good to say on behalf of Lucius Verus and Commodus and Faustina, yet, as we read the words of Marcus, we begin to suspect that history has been more censorious than some of them deserved; in comparison with Marcus they may have been moral pigmies, but they could not have been so wholly worthlessness as some of the historians have alleged or insinuated. Marcus was a sufficient specialist in goodness, a sufficiently objective scientist of the mind, to know the authentic stigmata of struggling virtue. Mommsen reproaches Marcus's inability to judge character, yet it is rather absurd to accuse him, "Verissimus," the truthfullest man of his time and perhaps any time, who could catalogue sins as well as anyone, of a quite fond and foolish blindness. He acted on principle, and perhaps on a sounder principle than that of the scandal-mongers. He simply would not let his mind dwell for more than a moment on any faults except his own; he would deliberately search for virtues, knowing all too well that men were weak; and it is highly probable that by this

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very habit of searching for them, he helped to create them in the men and women on whom he looked with so divine an inquisitiveness and charity. He "made bad men good, and good men very good."

Satirists like Juvenal and biographers of the Strachey school may think they see more clearly than men of a more generous if less entertaining type. But the sympathetic eyes of a good man may really see further and deeper and more truly than the eyes of the cynic. "It was notorious when I was at Oxford that when [a certain] one of these learned men was in the schools he was much more willing to give first classes than his colleagues. 'It is amazing,' he would say, 'how much these young men know!' Greatness in learning, like greatness in everything else, makes men, as Ruskin said, 'endlessly, foolishly, incredibly merciful' ".\* The historians may be all against Lucius Verus, but the Fronto *Correspondence* shows that the generous Marcus may have had some grounds for his generosity; he could discern behind weakness and vanity the stirring of nobler impulses. And Faustina—of her, too, there is much that is good to say, and perhaps, when we press the question, no demonstrated evil. Cynicism is too often the self-defensive armour of the former libertine or of the consciously incompetent.

It may be said that such charity, such goodness as that of Marcus, unless there were in it a strain of pitiable weakness, would have awakened a reciprocal hatred in really bad men, who needs must hate the highest when they see it. We remember that other face so like that of Marcus—if our painters have been right—and we ask

\* *Clifton School Addresses* (Irwin).

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why the fates of these two should have been so different though their dispositions and teachings were so similar. The most obvious answer is that while Christ sought, against pressure of vested interests, to establish a Kingdom of God on the earth, Marcus was almost born in the purple and had no call to pass beyond a tireless discharge of simple though vast and various duties. In his own magnificent words, he could "go on from one civic act to another" without much hindrance from men. He held the position which Christ, for one moment in the wilderness, coveted; he had been given the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and, though he never left a necessary duty undone or failed in moral or physical courage, he ruled with such modesty and such transparent love that there was no need to make enemies, and in fact he made but few. It is true that there was, we feel or seem to feel, something of mellowness in the Antonine period that was exceptional and utterly different from the thunderous atmosphere of Christ's Judaea. A time, too, would come, and fast enough—"that hell of a half century," as Renan called it—when a good man on the throne of the Empire would be slain as inevitably as Christ, but that time had not yet arrived, and Marcus could point out, after the unsuccessful revolt of Avidius Cassius, that though emperors had been slain before his time, good ones had not; there was for him the suggestion of a gracious Providence in the fact. Marcus, again on principle, sometimes looked at the best side of political life as well as at the best side of individual men.

Thus we get at times a fleeting and probably false impression that, if the mellow Antonine tradition could have been kept up, and the barbarians and Christians



kept out, goodness would gradually have conquered the stubborn hearts of men by its own native beauty. Such things do not commonly happen in the world, but we feel that this might have happened *then*.

Marcus faced misfortune in exactly the same spirit in which he faced moral evil; he sought for whatever blessedness could be extracted from it. "*Unlucky am I,*" he was sometimes tempted to groan, "*Unlucky am I that this has befallen me!*" He rejected the temptation at once. "*Rather, Lucky am I, that though this has befallen me yet am I still unhurt. . . . Why count that rather a misfortune than this a good fortune?*" Nay, further: "*This is no misfortune, but to bear it nobly is good fortune*" (IV, 49).

It may be objected that a Roman autocrat who reigned uninterruptedly for nineteen years as emperor-in-chief and had reigned for another twenty-two as subordinate emperor, had small reason to complain of life, and every reason to be Thankful. In point of fact the absence of objective troubles has not commonly generated a Cult of Thanksgiving among men or emperors, and Marcus had many troubles, especially during the years of the *Meditations*, and one trouble that might have been heart-breaking except that the heart of a convinced Stoic was fortified against the worst. His troubles, indeed, were so great that Marcus, ever true to himself, could in the end extract comfort from the fact that Death was near.

We shall look at Marcus from many standpoints in the study that follows, but none will be truer or better than this. Our age has almost lost the art or attitude of Thankfulness,—one main lesson of the *Meditations* and especially of the first book. It may be objected that the

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main lesson is better summed up in the famous death-bed password of Antoninus Pius. But *Equanimity* (or *Tranquillity*) was the maxim of all Stoics; it was hardly deep enough or warm enough for the astonishing spirituality of Marcus Aurelius. Nor was the "*Sustain and Abstain*" of Epictetus. Marcus, we seem bound to admit, was not in the roll of common men, or even of uncommon Stoics. The difficulty with him, as Myers says, was not to disdain the things of the earth but to care for them enough. And so he will not be merely equable or tranquil; he will not merely sustain and abstain; he will transform everything, the misfortunes of the moment, the weakness of Verus, even the invincibility of the Last Enemy, into Good, and therefore into a cause of Thanksgiving.

In the twelve books of the *Meditations*, moral lesson after moral lesson crowds upon us, each quite without pharisaic offensiveness when we realize that the voice is not that of Marcus preaching to the world of his time or of later times, but Marcus writing down secret reminders for his own use lest in the very few years that remained to him—he knew they were few—he might fall away from what he wished to be.

It may further be objected that his generosity failed him in one case, that of the Christians. But if the blot which, on this account, has so long rested on his fame and indeed on his character is to be partly reversed by a more careful investigation of the facts, most of the passages from the *Meditations* commonly alleged as proofs of his dislike of the Christians must be now regarded as attempts by Marcus to discover some good in their strange fanaticism. One of the greatest triumphs

of human nature, a justification for a Paeon of Thanksgiving on our own part, is that with all his prejudices and his pardonable resentment at their pacifism in the hours of the empire's danger, Marcus admired the courage of the Christians, and that they, with all their arrogance and amid their persecutions, admired him. *He knew that they were Brave; they knew that he was Good;* and during his very lifetime, it seems, they began to pay him the magnificent compliment of forging legends and edicts in proof of his goodness. And we know that he, on his side, came marvellously close to making the Christians the supreme exemplars of obedience to the God or Ruling Faculty that dwells within man's heart. At the worst, they were not puppets of passion or slaves to the crowd voice. He doubtless reminded himself that his own beloved Stoicism had had its martyrs not so very long ago; but actually, except for the theatrical exhibition of Peregrinus at the Olympic games, the Christians provided, for the moment, the only available examples of martyrdom. He could not miss the significance of that fact, though he was the last man to wish martyrdom of any kind to flourish in his empire. Its only advantage, and for this he was doubtless Thankful, was that it proved beyond doubt that there was in man an obstinate spark of the Divine.

It may be thought that between the Thankfulness with which Marcus regarded his tutors and immediate ancestors and his shy admiration for the so-called "obstinacy" of the Christians, there is no real connection or resemblance. But if the external resemblance is slight, the internal connection is, I think, quite definite. He seeks on principle to discover and record whatever is good in

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other people and to turn his eyes away, again on principle and not in self-delusion, from whatever is bad. His Thankfulness is not a matter of temperament but of duty; not of good digestion but of good-will to mankind. It is not often exuberant, but in extracting from the chaos and foulness of human society and human nature as much good as was possible, he doubtless extracted much quiet happiness for himself.

Stoicism had its Semitic origins though it came to flourish most among the Romans; we note definite affinities with Jewish Phariseeism and Christian Puritanism, and because of this last affinity it may yet have a future in England. And being fundamentally a system of Ethics, it had not much to say, any more than Phariseeism and Puritanism had much to say, about Beauty. But Beauty can be wholly ignored by no system, and one is interested to see how Marcus, true to the principle aforesaid, discovers it, almost with the ingenuity of a Baudelaire, in objects that are commonly held to be neutral or ugly. Even in them, he urges, there may be a charm and attractiveness if we examine them with care. Figs gaping open when ripe, bread splitting open in the baking, nay, the lion's brows and the boar's dripping jaws, these and many other things and circumstances, "though if looked at apart from their setting, they are far from being comely, yet as resultants from the operations of nature, [have a] charm and excite our admiration" (III, 2). We are reminded of the story, which comes from Mahommedan sources, of how Christ, gazing on a dead dog, an object of loathing to the crowd, said, "What beautiful teeth he has!" And we shall see, Marcus tells us, a charm in old age, and shall gaze on

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youth with eyes in which there is pure appreciation, if our hearts are morally prepared.

This, then, was the attitude of a great man of antiquity, standing not far from the gates of death; and this man of the *Meditations*, except for a few episodes preserved by the historians, was the only Marcus Aurelius known to the world until the year of Waterloo, when the discovery of the Fronto *Correspondence* began to lift the curtain from the Marcus of late adolescence and young manhood. And as we read that correspondence, we learn with delight that the elderly man has, so to speak, kept faith with us. No sowing of abundant wild oats has to be suspected or inferred; no scandal can be unearthed such as that which a few years ago threw a new light upon the career of a great, respectable, sedate, and sincere English poet. The younger Marcus is as radiant with goodness and generosity and refinement and almost as majestic in self-control as the older man we knew before, and he has more of Joy and all the familiar Thankfulness.

There remains a third Marcus whom we can only know, and that by faint suggestion, through the eyes of the Emperor Hadrian. We cannot see Marcus the Boy; and we would give much if, in another manuscript to be recovered from the East, we could learn how he impressed a praetor or a noble lady or a visitor from overseas. We can only guess that it was something of wistfulness or pensiveness or shining purity, or some rejoinder that spoke of a spirit more single and harmonious than that of any boy Hadrian had ever known, that attracted the attention of the disillusioned and ailing ruler, who, a few years later, was to be called upon to discharge the duty that Trajan had once discharged

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in his favour, and appoint a successor to the throne. Perhaps with the memory of the past there came back, as he looked into the boy's eyes, the face of Antinous; and, as we recall that name, evil be to him that evil thinks.\*

We read of the Choice of Hercules, and we know that it stands for a choice which most men have individually to face. The Choice of Hadrian comes rarely in the history of the world, and the Glory of Hadrian is that he chose with such success. The man who could appoint the adult Antoninus Pius as his successor, and the boy Marcus Aurelius as the successor of Antoninus, did something to which there is, I think, no historical parallel. It is true that the reputation of Antoninus already stood high and that Hadrian's choice of him, though splendid, was not astonishing. But that he could see in the face of Marcus Aurelius the beauty and grandeur of soul that the world, with its greater resources of knowledge, now knows to have been fathomless, was an achievement that lifts Hadrian, despite the ambiguities of his life, to a rank close to that of his two successors. As the torments assailed his corporeal frame, and the shadows gathered round his "animula vagula, blandula," he might, could he have foreseen the future, have drawn some alleviation and perhaps some felicity from the vision, and given utterance to a pagan *Nunc Dimittis*. He, too, might have felt Thankfulness.

\* On the matter here hinted I shall say nothing beyond this footnote. Marcus refers in his eulogy to the honourable record of Antoninus Pius, and Fronto and Marcus (I, *Fronto*, 21-33) refer to Plato's *Phaedrus* in so matter-of-fact a fashion as to astonish us, even if we have ceased to be astonished at the *Phaedrus* itself.

## CHAPTER I I

### THE EARLY YEARS OF MARCUS

MARCUS would often throw his memory, and then his thoughts, back to his predecessors in the purple. He sometimes did it to remind himself that he would soon be, like each of them, a figure of the past, that fame was of small account, and that it would be well for him to do his work faithfully while there was yet a little light in which to do it. The fact that "to-morrow we die" was for him the best of reasons for using the present day in the noblest of fashions, and perhaps the brevity of life was the very reason why he took the trouble to write the *Meditations*, his spiritual programme for the short time that remained, a scheme of private reminders lest he should flag before the end was reached.

In frequent retrospect, his mind would pass from the beloved, intimate, and vivid figure of his adoptive father and senior colleague, Antoninus Pius, back to the more enigmatic Hadrian, who, with eyes of divine discernment, had looked at him as a youth and changed his name and his fortunes; then, personal memory failing, Marcus would think of the great Trajan who had expanded the empire to its furthest limits; and then of the other emperors, some of them, alas! of a less satisfactory type than the great three, until Augustus was reached. All dead, he reflected; and all the unworthy ones (even the respectable Galba was avaricious) dead by violence! And he, Marcus, would go soon, but there was yet a little time in which to do good and to try to be good.

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It was at the figure of Hadrian, as I have said, that the memory of Marcus stopped. For seventeen years, as infant, child, and youth, he had lived under the emperor who had introduced the Greek fashion of imperial beards and, what was more important, had sought to establish a tradition of imperial pacifism. And if Marcus had believed not only in providence but also in auspicious coincidences, he might have seen something both providential and auspicious for the peace of the world in the time of his own birth.

Hadrian had decided that the forward policy of Trajan should be reversed and that the frontiers of the empire were too lengthy and in parts too remote to be securely defended; in pursuance of which conviction he caused to be built, after his visit to Britain (119-120) the wall which still stretches from the Tyne to the Solway, abandoning the country beyond it to the barbarians. In the next year, he applied this policy to the other end of the empire. Trajan had carried the Roman arms to the Persian Gulf; had seen there, with kindling imagination, a ship starting for India; had longed, like Napoleon after him, to emulate the deeds of Alexander; had realized, nevertheless, the stern limitations of the case and had turned home, receiving in his withdrawal a temporary set-back, and dying of a wound in Cilicia. Despite the set-back, Parthia was, for the moment, cowed, but Trajan's successor saw clearly enough that conquest was impossible; in 122 he accordingly sought a personal interview with the Parthian monarch, obtained an assurance of peace, and thereupon retracted the frontiers of the empire. Not till the reign of Marcus himself would Roman armies traverse again those ancient lands of



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Accad and Sumeria, where, still later, Julian was to lead the eagles and to perish, the last of the pagan emperors.

Beyond these two significant changes of frontier, Hadrian's restless travellings were the chief feature of his reign, and, except for the last four years of his life, little time was spent by him in Rome.

The birth of Marcus Aurelius took place between the British and Parthian episodes; the time, April, 121 A.D.; the place, the Caelian Hill.

As is often the case with great men, the mother of our subject figures as a greater influence than the father; but this was not due to paternal demerit. Annius Verus was prefect of the city, had been three times consul, and was in possession, Marcus long afterwards reported, of "modesty and manliness." But he died soon after the birth of his son; and if it was three months after, as some authorities assert, Marcus had to learn about him from the testimony of others. But two facts seem to go counter to the three months theory; first, that Marcus himself, at the beginning of the *Meditations*, implies that he remembered his father at least a little; second, that the sister of Marcus was born apparently some two years after himself. All we know for certain is that his father died while he was yet a boy. The fact recorded by Capitolinus (if it be a fact) that at the beginning of his life Marcus was named after his maternal great-grandfather, who was no "Verus," is rather difficult to reconcile with the "Verissimus" story told below. There may be some legal point involved.

How much Marcus owed to his mother, Domitia Lucilla (or Calvilla), we can never fully know. In the Fronto *Correspondence* (I, 131-7, 147-51) there are

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letters *in Greek* from his tutor Fronto to her, praising her domestic and other virtues. He has such a respect for her scholarship that he asks Marcus, then about twenty-two, to look over the Greek of these letters before letting his mother see them. Her son testified in the *Meditations* that in her he had an example of fear of God, generosity, simple life, and abstention not only from evil acts but from evil thoughts. Her example was powerful and long-continued. She survived to within a few years of his becoming full emperor. On the arrival of the sister of Marcus, "Anna Cornificia," the family was complete. He was able, years afterwards, to express thanks that he had a "good sister," but his reference to "brothers" must not be misunderstood. Lucius Verus became, it is true, his adoptive brother, but he had no brother according to the flesh.

On the death of his father, Marcus had to move to the house of that grandfather by blood who is lifted to a mild but eternal fame in the opening words of the *Meditations*, because in him Marcus had found an example of a "kindly disposition and sweetness of temper." Happy Marcus to have had "good grandfathers, good parents, a good sister, good teachers, good companions, kinsmen, friends, nearly all of them"; the testimony should be remembered in view of the many libels on pagan civilization; but, as already said, we may suspect that the goodness of Marcus himself had something to do with the record; probably, in the splendid words of Capitolinus, "*he made bad men good and good men very good.*" Maybe his mother accompanied him, or he accompanied her, to the new abode in the Lateran neighbourhood, as she certainly did afterwards to the imperial palace.

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Historians would give a great deal to possess a few episodes, even if semi-legendary, of the life of Marcus the boy. There is hardly a fragment of one. There are the records of the above-mentioned change of residence (or two changes); a contact, perhaps casual, though (as it happened) momentous, with the emperor Hadrian; the appointment to a ceremonial post; the assumption of the *toga virilis*; and finally his selection to the purple.

We are told by Capitolinus, and it is a very good guess, that Marcus was a grave child from the first, though we shall also learn, and from a contemporary and certainly reliable source, that many years later he was quite capable of a youthful prank. Later on, too, we shall hear from himself, writing as an ageing man, a good deal about his teachers, but by "teachers" will be meant, in all probability, the teachers of his adolescence and early manhood, rather than those of his faraway boyhood.

Capitolinus mentions among these last, Euphorion (for literature), Geminus (for drama), and Andron (for music and geometry), men whom Marcus subsequently rewarded; other instructors, at a more advanced stage, included a number of grammarians and rhetoricians, such as Herodes Atticus, Alexander of Cotiaenum, and Cornelius Fronto (whose intimate acquaintance we shall make later on), and certain philosophers even more important than any, except the last, of these men.

We are now confronted by one of the most important episodes in the spiritual history of the world, conveyed to us, however, in so scanty a form that a little exercise of imagination is needed if we are to reconstruct it.

It was only to be expected that to Marcus, living in

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Rome and descended on both sides from magistrates of the highest rank, praetors, prefects, consuls, and senators, the emperor Hadrian would be far more than a name. Perhaps it was the break-up of the household on the death of the boy's father that led to the assumption of the name Annius Verus, that of the grandfather and father alike; and some time later to Hadrian's ever famous and truly inspired remark that the boy's name should be "not Verus but Verissimus." To only one other famous ruler in history has the adjective "True" been applied as the inevitable label, the *mot juste*: that other ruler is Alfred the Great, "Alfred the Truth-teller." In the case of Marcus it was doubtless some ingenuousness of look and reply that struck the emperor, tired of the world's slanders, intrigues, and prevarications; something of the same thing that came to another soul a century before amid the contentions of disciples for the first place. Henceforth the boy was a protégé of the emperor, and it was due to him that at the age of six he was enrolled in the equestrian order and at the age of eight was made a Salian Priest of Mars.

We are tempted, in view of the exquisite pacifism of the *Meditations*, to think of Marcus as a man of peace, which indeed he was, peace within the household, the city, the nation, the world; peace too, or at least tranquillity, within the human heart. Lovely words like *πραῖος* (meek), *ἡλεως* (gracious), *εὐμενής* (kind), occur on every page of the *Meditations*; and there is hardly a military metaphor, I think, from the first page to the last. But Marcus was a son of Rome; and Romulus and Remus were sons of Mars the war-god; and King Numa, though himself pacific, had thought fit to institute, we are told,

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a priestly college in honour of the god who had begotten these heroes and thus created Rome. It was a highly select college, originally of twelve members only, one for each of the twelve sacred shields; and every March, the month of the god, there were elaborate ceremonies in honour of him, including a war dance. When Hadrian made Marcus, a boy of eight or thereabouts, a dancing or Salian Priest of Mars (*salire* = to leap) it was, we can be sure, with no special motive of dedicating him to the active service of the war-god; Hadrian was pacific if not a pacifist. But there was such a thing as Roman tradition, and Hadrian may have thought that the studious boy before him needed a stiffening in the conventional things of life. Marcus was hardly yet a Stoic with cosmopolitan sympathies, but he was different from the "common or garden" Roman.

In connection with this appointment, Capitolinus tells us one of those stories of the *post eventum* type which we are familiar with in the case of many famous men. As the collegiates were, according to custom, casting their crowns about, that of Marcus fell on the brow of the recumbent war-god himself. It was, we are led to believe, an omen, like the sheaves bowing down to the sheaf of Joseph. More reliable is the information that Marcus took his duties as Salian Priest very seriously, and became so complete a master of the ritual of the college that no prompter was needed.

And here we may well note the sequel of after years. The reign of Marcus was the reverse of the peaceful reign of his predecessor Antoninus Pius, and we cannot doubt that he felt as much regret for having to spend so many of his years in camp instead of among his books

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and his civic duties as Milton felt centuries later in having to leave "a calm and pleasing solitariness fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark on a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes." But Marcus was the last man to shirk any duty, military or other, that came his way; he manfully shouldered the task of a *generalissimo* and, so far as the records go, he shouldered it with considerable success. History has never enrolled him among the list of great warriors, yet there was one moment in his reign when the fate of the empire was in the balance, and there is no evidence of failure of his own generalship in the field. The strain on the resources of the empire was great, but when the end came to his two chief periods of campaigning, the first as a result of a rebellion that called him to the East, and the second of the summons of death, the arms of Rome were triumphing and the frontiers being pushed forward rather than withdrawn. The Priest of Mars did not fail the god of his boyish days, any more than he failed the grander and later summons of the invisible City of God. Nevertheless, among the last reported words of Marcus, called forth by some horror at the front, was the significant cry, "Such is war's disastrous work!"

It was at about the age of twelve that he heard for the first time the greater summons and obeyed it. Rusticus, Diognetus, and most of his tutors belonged to the Stoic school of thought and morals. Their influence over him grew and grew until, at some memorable and predestinating moment of his adolescence, the full glory of their creed flashed upon his mind to hold him, in fascinated fidelity, for ever. The thrill of Christian conversion has often been described; at its greatest it could

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hardly have surpassed in rapture and convincingness the thrill that came to Marcus when he heard the Stoic Call of Service to Humanity and knew that his little self was part of a Universal Soul. A "part," a "*meros*"? Nay: the word was far too cold, far too mathematical to express the adorable relation: "if thou sayest thou art but a part not yet dost thou love mankind from the heart, not yet does well-doing delight thee for its own sake." The "r" must be changed to "l" and *meros* becomes *melos*, "limb." Thou must say, "I am a limb of the organized body of rational beings." Marcus said it, and rejoiced (VII, 13).

It was a sublime moment and unforgettable. To his last days he would seek to recall it, to live again in the light and warmth of it. As an old man with death ever in his thought he would yet say, recalling that moment and those glorious years, "Thou canst begin a new life! See but things afresh as thou usedst to see them." Marcus in his later years was not often the buoyantly happy being of that earlier time of delightful companionship with his tutors and of loving partnership with Antoninus Pius, but he had one of the qualifications of Wordsworth's *Happy Warrior*: brought among the tasks of real life, he wrought

Upon the plan that pleased his boyish thought.

In his great book he expressed his thankfulness that there was no compromise in his attitude; that Diognetus had gone to that extreme of the Stoic creed which caused the heart to be set on "the pallet bed and pelt." The version of Capitolinus is that he adopted "the dress and, a little later, the hardness of a philosopher, pursuing

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his studies clad in a rough Greek cloak, and sleeping on the ground; at his mother's solicitation, however, he reluctantly consented to sleep on a couch strewn with skins." He was already resolved—no Christian or Buddhist monk has ever been more resolved—to empty his heart of every earthly desire.

A year or two later (about 135) he assumed the *toga virilis* of manhood and a little later still (about 136) performed the first of those magnanimous deeds of renunciation by which his life was distinguished. The paternal legacy that fell to him he gave up in favour of his only sister Cornificia.

And now comes the momentous year 138, momentous for the actors in the drama, momentous for the Roman world, and momentous, we may even add, for the spiritual welfare of mankind through the ages.

Since 134 Hadrian's many travels had ceased, and now, at his great Tibur villa east of Rome, the burden of years and of declining health reminded him of that duty to the future once performed by the dying Trajan. He selected as his successor the father of the boy who was afterwards known to history as Lucius Verus, and then, when the unexpected death of his nominee nullified this plan, his mind turned to the youth who had prophetically received from him some years before the name "Verissimus."

That youth, however, was not yet eighteen, and though Rome was to receive forty-two years later an emperor little more than that age (and to pay dearly for it) there was no justification in 138 for so young an appointment. But Hadrian was not to be baulked of his inspired choice of the young Verissimus as the future Lord of the Roman



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world. He looked around him for a man who, himself of mature age, might worthily fill the gap of years between the late adolescence and the full maturity of Marcus, and he found the man in the person of Antoninus, later called Pius, who had distinguished himself in all he had undertaken and had won golden opinions of all sorts of people. Antoninus, who had lost his only two sons and one of his two daughters, agreed to adopt Marcus as his son and successor, and meanwhile to become the immediate nominee of Hadrian. And then, maybe, there came to the emperor the thought of the earlier nomination that had been frustrated by death. Lucius Verus, the son of the dead man, was many years younger than Marcus and a pleasant and kindly boy; Hadrian proposed that he, too, should be adopted as a son of Antoninus, for in view of the fatal childlessness of emperors, it might be well to have a good supply of princes from which the future could draw. And Lucius was probably a lustier boy than Marcus.

Inasmuch as some people have gone so far as to speak of the life of Marcus as a "martyrdom"—a view I do not hold—and others see in it at least a "tragedy," it will be well, Shakespeare-fashion, to preserve and perhaps accentuate whatever element of comedy our story provides. Lucius Verus and Alexander of Abonoteichos will later supply the element. We are told by Capitolinus that the boy Lucius, adoptive "brother" of Marcus, loved, and was also loved by, his tutors; for he was fond of composing verses just as, later on in life, he was fond of composing orations. "He is said to have been a better orator than poet, or rather . . . a worse poet than speaker." Some say that "the things credited to him, such as they

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were, were written by others. . . . He was devoted to pleasure, too care-free, and very clever . . . at every kind of frolic."

Meanwhile we have seen what Marcus was like in these same years; the contrast will remain to the end. Will some dramatist ever give us that great comedy, *Marcus and Lucius*? Maybe it would not stage well, but the comic is already there in those early years, and it will later become exuberant.

However, in 138 the question of the succession was satisfactorily settled. Antoninus would follow Hadrian, and Marcus would follow Antoninus; and away in the background was the figure of the lively Lucius Verus. The best laid schemes of men often fail, but this scheme of Hadrian's was to prove a magnificent exception.

### CHAPTER III

#### WRITERS AND PHILOSOPHERS

IN religious biography the chief event in a man's life is very often his "conversion." That event in the life of Marcus was described in the last chapter. When he became a Stoic, in early adolescence, the main features of his development were marked out. To be a Stoic was to be something as definite as to be a Christian, and with Marcus there was to be no apostasy or even relapse.

I shall have much to say in Chapter IV about the men who personally influenced Marcus in these weighty affairs of the spirit, but it will be well at this point to pause in my biographical narrative and to give some indication of the literary and philosophic atmosphere of the Antonine age. Who were the eminent writers and thinkers contemporary with Marcus, whether or not they entered personally into his life? One name belonging to a slightly earlier generation I must also include in this survey, and the inclusion of it will have the advantage of allowing me to begin my chapter with a Stoic and to finish it with an Epicurean, and to confront the reader with the problem, as important to-day as ever it was in the time of Marcus, whether the Stoic or the Epicurean attitude is the more precious for humanity. With regard to these two I remark that though we do not know when *Epictetus* died it was probably some few years before Marcus was born, and we know that *Lucian of Samosata* survived Marcus, though not for long.

When Matthew Arnold was asked, in the most pessi-

mistic days of the nineteenth century, what were the spiritual supports of his mind, he mentioned the names of three famous pagans, Homer, Sophocles ("who saw life steadily and saw it whole") and Epictetus,

That halting slave who in Nicopolis  
Taught Arrian, when Vespasian's brutal son  
Clear'd Rome of what most shamed him.

Marcus Aurelius, if asked the same question, would have begun or finished with the last of the three names. There are a dozen or more references to *Epictetus* in the *Meditations*, and, as we shall learn, one of the merits of Rusticus in the eyes of his pupil Marcus was that he had introduced him to the writings of the "halting slave." It is one of the spiritual romances of history that the saintliest of the pagan emperors drew inspiration from such a lowly source, learning from Epictetus, more vividly than from other writers, three main doctrines of the Stoic creed; that there is nothing really good or bad except the will; that men should reconcile themselves to whatever destiny is assigned to them by the Nature of Things; and that men form one vast society or City of God.

The first two of these doctrines took very strenuous forms in the teachings of most Stoics, who drew a sharp distinction between acts of will (which were all-important and all equally important, there being no shades or degrees in rightness), and the other affairs of life which were matters of "Indifference." Marcus may not quite have accepted this rigorism in all its implications, but he did accept the autonomy of the will and its practical corollary of "Sustain and Abstain." With regard to the

third doctrine of the City of God he had no doubts and no qualifications.

Leaving philosophers and coming down to the actual time of Marcus, we note that, among writers in Latin stands *Cornelius Fronto*, of whom the reader will hear a good deal in this book, and a second writer from the same African province which gave Fronto to the world, namely *Apuleius*, whose most famous work, commonly called *The Golden Ass*, is chiefly remembered on account of the story of Cupid and Psyche. *Suetonius*, historian of the Caesars, died just before the accession of Marcus to the throne. As that emperor often recalled the lives and deaths of his predecessors it is probable that he knew the work of Suetonius. *Aulus Gellius* flourished under Marcus Aurelius, and in several detailed references to Fronto shows us that writer's interest in matters of language and the high respect in which he was held as a scholar.

More important than the above were the writers who chose Greek for their literary medium. The historian *Arrian* lived during the reigns of Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus and died about the same time as our emperor. He wrote a history of Alexander the Great and many other works, but his importance for us lies chiefly in his connection with Epictetus, the most interesting figure, except Marcus himself, in the Stoic succession. When Domitian

Clear'd Rome of what most shamed him

—that is to say, expelled the philosophers—and Epictetus settled at Nicopolis opposite the heel of Italy, Arrian there became his pupil and took verbatim notes

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of those lectures which afterwards became a textbook of Ethics for pagans and Christians alike. Marcus may have had other sources of information relative to the teaching of the "halting slave" whom he so much revered, but he doubtless appreciated to the full the faithful work of Arrian.

Not to be confused with Arrian is *Appian* who about the time when Marcus became emperor, wrote a History of Rome. He was a friend of Fronto, and there are three letters in the *Correspondence* in which he appears. Fronto solicited Antoninus Pius on his behalf (I, *Fronto*, 263-5) and Marcus and Lucius gave him office.

Some time between 160 and 169—that is during the joint reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus—*Polyaenus* wrote a book on the art of military strategy and dedicated it to the two emperors. It can scarcely have exerted any influence on either the Parthian or the Marcomannic War.

One of the world's greatest astronomers and geographers lived into the reign of Marcus Aurelius, *Ptolemy of Alexandria*.

One of the world's greatest physicians and physiologists, *Galen*, was a few years younger than Marcus, attended the royal family, and survived into the reign of Septimius Severus.

The archaeological traveller *Pausanias* began to publish his *Tour around Greece*, a description of the buildings and ruins available to the traveller, some little time before the accession of Marcus, and finished it about the time of his death. Marcus was too intelligent a man to be an enemy either of science or of archaeology; as a young Caesar he had visited the town of Anagnia

## Marcus Aurelius

and been interested in its antiquities (I, *Fronto*, p. 175); but youth was now over, his heart was in other things, and he nowhere makes any reference to Ptolemy or Pausanias in his *Meditations*, nor by any known act of his life.

In the case of the next writer there was, however, actual contact. *Aristides* (not to be confused with "Aristides the Just") was a philosopher of Cyzicus and Smyrna, who wrote and spoke discourses on historical episodes taken from Greek history, and in the year before the accession of Marcus composed a Panegyric on Rome. The Rome of the Antonines, let us hope, deserved his panegyric. Addressing Antoninus Pius he says:

Neither the sea nor intervening lands debar men from citizenship, nor is Asia distinguished from Europe. All is open to all. None worthy of office is regarded as a stranger; the whole commonwealth of the earth is governed by one good ruler. . . . You hold universal empire, but this is the distinguishing mark of your empire, that you rule over men who are free.

You alone [Pius and Marcus] has nature fitted to be rulers. The whole world keeps holiday; the ancient burden of the sword has been laid aside. . . . All strife is stilled; there remains only the rivalry of cities, striving how each may be the fairest and most beautiful. . . . The whole earth is adorned as it were a garden.

This glowing scene was, we shall find, soon overcast. We shall meet Aristides in two capacities later on.

As a literary figure *Lucian of Samosata* stands higher than any of the preceding men. He was a year or two younger than Marcus and survived him, dying under Commodus. The latter emperor gave him a well-paid post in Egypt, and though there is no evidence, I think,

that Commodus had read a word of Lucian or had enjoyed a single one of his jokes at the expense of imposture, we will reckon the appointment of the aged *littérateur* among the few creditable acts of the son of Marcus.

Lucian is one of the world's half dozen supreme masters of the Comic. Probably an Epicurean, certainly a man of Epicurean sympathies, he is a preacher of genial humanity and an arch exposé of pretensions and hocus-pocus. At much risk to himself he tracked down the tricks of Alexander of Abonoteichus and is our chief authority on the history of that Rasputin or Cagliostro of antiquity. He was present, too, at the voluntary cremation of the Cynic Peregrinus at Olympia and is, again, our chief authority for that event. Lucian borrowed the dialogue form from Plato and infused into it a cheerful and at times cynical humour only occasionally present in the great philosopher's works. This humour he employs impartially at the expense of the Olympian gods and the professional philosophers of the time.

I used the word "cynical" in the modern sense, but actually Lucian was a severe though not blind critic of the sect of the Cynics and was hardly more favourable to their allies the Stoics.

Unless methods of publication were more inefficient than we imagine, much of Lucian's work must have been known to Marcus Aurelius, though a little was written after the emperor's death. One is therefore impressed by the freedom with which Lucian treats the sect to which, as everyone knew, I suppose, the emperor belonged, and treats, too, grave topics that were very near his heart. When, as the years closed in, Marcus wrestled



more and more earnestly with the alternatives: (1) A Universe of Chaos without design; (2) A Universe of rigid Fate; (3) A Universe of Gracious Providence, and decided that there was a balance of probability in favour of the third, he was placing himself in opposition to the Epicureans and to the brilliant dialogue-writer who was his own almost exact contemporary. Many of the most telling and serious passages in Lucian are directed against the idea of Providence and against all the ideas for which Marcus cared most. In the opinion of Lucian, man had to be his own Providence.

What Marcus thought of it we can only speculate. Though belonging to the rival school, he showed no active bitterness against Epicurus, and once or twice quoted him with approval, but we may infer that, while feeling sympathy with the humanitarian ideas of Lucian, he was not happy over the jests at the expense of the gods. For State reasons, at least, it were well for people to be reverent. Now Lucian was consistently irreverent, devoting all the resources of his caustic wit to the task of making the gods ridiculous. The gods—and the Stoics and the Cynics.

Take, for example, the exquisitely funny Dialogue called *Zeus Tragoedus*. We see the gods perturbed by the manifest anxiety shown in the demeanour of Father Zeus. Hera suspects another love affair, but Zeus announces that his preoccupation has quite another cause; the position of the whole hierarchy is precarious, for mortals are rapidly ceasing to honour the gods, mainly as a result of the scandalous blasphemies and essential atheism of the Epicureans. Only yesterday a debate was going on between Timocles the Stoic and Damis the

Epicurean in the presence of a large assembly of mortals, and the Epicurean was palpably getting the better of the argument, though openly questioning the existence of the gods and utterly denying their interest in or government of events. "These," said Zeus, "are the alternatives for us—to be dismissed as mere empty names, or (if Timocles prevails) to enjoy our customary honours." And as Timocles the Stoic was *not* prevailing, something must be done.

Hera suggests that in view of so serious a crisis the whole body of the gods should be assembled; Athena considers that this would only spread celestial apprehension more widely; better use quieter measures to ensure the victory of Timocles. But she is out-voted, and the gods assemble, new gods and old gods quarrelling violently over their precedence; even Apollo has in the end to take one of the third-class seats, vulgar gods from Asia and Africa are so distressingly numerous. Zeus is at first nervous and forgets his exordium, but falling back on a speech of Demosthenes he gets at last under weigh and explains how badly things are going on among mortals. Thus, a ship's captain in a storm had recently invoked no less than sixteen gods, but when the danger was over he offered up only one single cock—an old bird afflicted with catarrh—together with half-a-dozen grains of frankincense so mildewed that they hardly gave out enough smoke to reach the divine nostrils at all. And then look at this debate between Damis the Epicurean and Timocles the Stoic; the latter, poor fellow, bathed in perspiration and his voice giving way under the strain, while the atheist goads him with mocking laughter. And the question at issue between

the two debaters was the all-important one of Divine Providence, blasphemously denied by Damis!

"You now know the occasion of our meeting," added Zeus, "no light one, ye gods. If they should accept as true either our absolute non-existence or, short of that, our indifference to them, farewell to our earthly sacrifices, attributes, honours; we shall sit starving and ineffectual in Heaven." What was to be done in such a crisis?

Momus, god of Mockery or Censure, suggests that it is the fault of the gods themselves who have persistently neglected good men and allowed scoundrels to be honoured and rewarded; even temple-robbers go undetected and unpunished, while innocent men are flogged or crucified. Why should mortals believe in gods who are so incompetent or neglectful? Add to this the tricky ambiguity of the oracles—supposed to be divine voices—and the endless stories to the discredit of the gods; their loves, their quarrels! How was it possible for men to believe that the gods guided the world providentially? "We gods get our deserts and shall continue to get them when men open their eyes by degrees and find that sacrifices and processions bring them no profit."

Zeus replies that criticism is easy, but a constructive policy difficult to devise. Poseidon suggests that Zeus employ his thunderbolt on Damis, but the king of the gods reminds him; (1) that such instruments are in the hands of Fate, not of the gods; (2) that to kill Damis by a thunderbolt would create a bad impression among mortals by suggesting that the gods were afraid of Damis's arguments; (3) that the said arguments would continue to be used even if Damis were out of the way.

Apollo suggests that the trouble is with Timocles who, though a worthy man and an excellent Stoic scholar, has a poor voice, a provincial accent, and a lack of oratorical confidence and lucidity; it were desirable to provide him with an able counsel to give his speeches; the arguments could still come from Timocles but the words would be those of the more eloquent advocate. Momus mocks this suggestion and confounds Apollo by reminding him of his lack of lucidity when he gives oracles at Delphi or elsewhere; if Apollo is indeed a prophet who knows the future let him prophesy and say which of the two disputants will win! Apollo apologises on the ground that he is without his tripod and incense, but, nevertheless, produces an oracle which is laughed out of court by Momus.

Heracles now makes a suggestion. Let the debate go on, and if Damis seems to be winning, he (Heracles) will cause an earthquake and bring the Portico down upon the blasphemer's head. The suggestion revolts Zeus, who sees the injustice of destroying a crowd of people because of one man's wickedness, and also reminds the gods that it is Fate which sends earthquakes. "Then," says Heracles, "when I slew the Lion or the Hydra, was I only Fate's instrument?" and when Zeus replies, "Yes," Heracles retires in disgust to Hades where, he hopes, he will be able to do some business among the ghosts.

A messenger now enters and announces breathlessly that Damis and Timocles are at it again, whereupon the gods look over the celestial rampart and listen with strained attention to the debate. Alas, Timocles is still getting the worst of it and is descending to abuse.

*Marcus Aurelius*

TIMOCLES.—What, you miscreant, no Gods? No Providence?

DAMIS.—No, no; you answer my question first: what makes you believe in them? . . .

TIMOCLES.—Tell me, then, and be damned to you. . . .

And so the debate goes on, really as serious as anything in the *Meditations* and cleverer than most of the debates of to-day between critics and apologists. How little has been added to the dialectic armoury since those years in which Lucian ridiculed gods and providence, while Marcus at Rome or in his billet on the Danube, argued that there must be both, in some sense or other! We have only added, I suppose, a greater stress on the idea of development. The point brought out clearly in this dialogue and many others, is that the Stoics were apologists for the old religion while the Epicureans were critics.

I shall have done the reader good service if the above brief reference to Lucian of Samosata leads to a fuller acquaintance with one of the world's master humorists. But I have hardly done justice to the principles of the various schools of philosophy that play their lively parts in Lucian's dialogues. Later, as I approach the death of Marcus, I shall have to refer to the attitude of these several schools to death and in particular to suicide, but a few words with regard to their attitude towards Life are legitimate at this point.

Broadly, it may be said that the Cynics and Stoics were impressed by the Oneness of the universe; their rivals, the Cyrenaics and Epicureans, by the *absence* of Oneness, and with this the absence of meaning and purpose. The former held themselves to be parts of a single great Organism (which might be called either Nature or God, according to taste) and in their souls

they felt its mystic pressure and they called this pressure Duty. They did not analyse further the Duty they so consistently eulogized and faithfully followed: it was just the voice of the Whole speaking to the Part, the voice of God, or Cosmos, or Nature, or (in slightly more limited terms) of what Auguste Comte called the "Great Being," Humanity. Much noble work for slaves and unfortunates was done by the Stoics under the influence of this belief in the Oneness of the Universe and particularly the Oneness of the human race; they supplied, too, in their own persons, many examples of real heroism and martyrdom under Nero and other tyrants. For, as men were fragments or, better still, "limbs" or "members" of the Universe, men were really divine so far as the Universe was itself divine, and it behoved a divine being to be noble and brave and compassionate; in fact to remember his divinity, and, if necessary, to demonstrate it by the "last sacrifice."

Critics could pick holes in such a system of thought, and could, in particular, challenge the Stoics to come down from their stilts and *explain* Duty more fully, but it can hardly be said that the alternative philosophy was more satisfactory.

The Epicureans began with the atom (an idea inherited from Democritus, the "laughing philosopher") and tried hard to explain everything in atomic and crudely evolutionary terms. Somehow, by the interaction and combination—the "fortuitous concourse"—of atoms, the whole Universe came gradually into existence; all talk about Divinity was thus rendered unnecessary, and when questions of Duty arose they had to be solved in terms, apparently simple, of Pleasure, or rather Happi-

ness. With this key in their hands the Epicureans reached conclusions in the matter of Conduct not very different from those of the Stoics, but there was an enormous difference in emphasis, outlook, or feeling, as can be felt by anyone who reads the two writers who begin and end this chapter, namely Epictetus and Lucian, or, if exact contemporaries are preferred, Lucian and Marcus Aurelius.

On very few points of practical conduct does Lucian differ from the emperor, but a difference of feeling, as I say, is very noticeable, and on one point it is sharp. The Stoic was compelled to use, with reverence, the current theological language about the "gods," though, true to his pantheism, the Gods themselves must be allowed to be identifiable when necessary with the "universe." Without this vague theological background the Stoic felt that the challenge of Duty would lose its vehemence. The Epicurean, on the contrary, took things more easily except when he thrilled to his own favourite theme—really thrilled to it as much as the Stoic thrilled to his. Whereas the Stoic actively revered the third member in the Trinity of Truth, Beauty, and Duty the Epicurean actively revered the first. He relegated the gods to so remote a region of the universe as practically to abolish them, thus winning for himself the title of "atheist"; and he opposed himself to the current superstitions and sometimes ventured, as Lucian claims to have done in a particular case, life itself in this holy cause of Truth.

Which of the sectarians deserves the more gratitude from Humanity, the Slave of Duty or the Slave of Truth? The question is a hard one, and the antithesis, let us hope,

will be found, on examination, to be unreal; that Duty is Truth, Truth Duty, some Keats of the future may perhaps demonstrate. There was heroism in the Epicurean philosophy when sincerely believed and acted on; and to-day, when we see superstitions older than Lucian stalking forth as great and priceless gospels, we are sometimes tempted to cry "Thou shouldst be living at this hour!" to the unheeding ghost of Epicurus, or Lucretius, or Lucian. At other times, as we note some slackening of moral fibre in our contemporaries, we would cry in the same sense to Zeno, Chrysippus, Epictetus, and above all to Marcus Aurelius. But our ultimate cry should surely be: "When, when shall we have a Philosophy of Life that is both Epicurean and Stoic," or, as I urge in my *Unknown Cromwell*, that takes account alike of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*?

One wishes that Christianity, as some of its advocates would like to persuade us, were that missing, that supreme Philosophy. Were Marcus and Lucian forgetful of the rising creed? Nearly, but not quite. Marcus, we shall learn, had it a little in his mind though he never mentions it by name; Lucian, much hated by later Christians on account of a dialogue (*Philopatris*) which was falsely attributed to him, has little to say of them except in one important passage of the Peregrinus narrative:

It was now that he [Peregrinus] came across the priests and scribes of the Christians, in Palestine, and picked up their queer creed. I can tell you, he pretty soon convinced them of his superiority; prophet, elder, ruler of the Synagogue—he was everything at once; expounded their books, commented on them, wrote books himself. They took him for



a God, accepted his laws, and declared him their president. The Christians, you know, worship a *man* to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account. Well, the end of it was that [he] was arrested and thrown into prison. This was the very thing to lend an air to his favourite arts of clap-trap and wonder-working; he was now a made man. The Christians took it all very seriously; he was no sooner in prison, than they began trying every means to get him out again—but without success. Everything else that could be done for him they most devoutly did. They thought of nothing else. Orphans and ancient widows might be seen hanging about the prison from break of day. Their officials bribed the gaolers to let them sleep inside with him. Elegant dinners were conveyed in; their sacred writings were read; and our friend became for them “the modern Socrates.” In some of the Asiatic cities, too, the Christian communities put themselves to the expense of sending deputations, with offers of sympathy, assistance, and legal advice. The activity of these people, in dealing with any matter that affects their community, is something extraordinary; they spare no trouble, no expense. Peregrine, all this time, was making quite an income on the strength of his bondage; money came pouring in. You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on trust, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property. Now an adroit, unscrupulous fellow, who has seen the world, has only to get among these simple souls, and his fortune is pretty soon made; he plays with them.

That is all of importance, I think, that Lucian has to

say about the Christians. We may note, however, that in the thoughts of a friend of his the Christians played a considerable part. The interesting work of *Celsus*, saved for posterity by Origen, was a well-informed attack on Christianity; while on the Christian side appeared, during the reign of Antoninus, the *Apology for the Christians* by *Justin Martyr*, and, during the reign of Marcus, the *Octavius* of *Minucius Felix*, a defence by a sympathizer if not an advocate; and there were other defences or at least appeals. Under Commodus and his successors *Tertullian* became a Christian and a fiery defender of the faith until, as a Montanist, he turned his guns upon a Church sinking, as he thought, into worldliness and compromise. Justin in his way had been quite as emphatic; the emperors would pay for persecutions in fire everlasting!

If in all this I have pictured Stoics and Epicureans in too favourable, too heroic a light, the antidote will be found in the works of *Lucian*. That writer, for all his scepticism and his satire, is not unfair though he is probably more unfair to Stoics and Cynics than to his own sect. When, as in the case of *Demonax*, he is describing a noble man of another school than his own he rises splendidly to the task; in some of his dialogues, too, he gives the other side a very good argumentative innings. *Lucian* was, in fact, a really earnest and clean-minded man; even the dialogues that deal with *hetairae* are not what we should expect. Would that he could have given us a full-length picture of the contemporary emperor who was facing the problems of existence as bravely as himself; all he says, so far as I can discover, is this, addressed to an "illiterate book-fancier":

## *Marcus Aurelius*

You know the emperor's scholarly tastes, and his respect for culture, and you think it will be worth something to you if he hears of your literary pursuits. . . . Vile creature! and is the emperor drugged with mandragora that he should never know . . . your tipplings . . . your debauches? . . . A man's hopes of the imperial favour depend not on his book-bills but on his character and daily life

words which testify that if Epicureanism in the person of Lucian was not so uncensorious as Stoicism in the person of Marcus, it was not a creed for people who loved a "sensual sty." The Porch of Zeno and the Garden of Epicurus were not too far apart for hailing purposes.

## THE PERSONAL TEACHERS OF MARCUS

I HOPE the reader—perhaps a modern of the moderns—will not be offended by the form into which this chapter is cast, with its “Commandments” reminiscent of the Decalogue and perhaps, in some respects, an improvement on it. “Moralizing” is very much out of fashion in these days, but it was the main concern of the Stoics, who, to do them justice, often put their moralizing into practice. They had very little belief in the sacredness and efficacy of untrained impulse, and Marcus constantly refers to the desirability of having at his fingers’ ends (or at the tip of his monitory tongue) a *maxim*, or “*dogma*,” or “*axiom*” as he calls it, for every moral emergency of life. Once, recalling perhaps the death of one of his boys, operated on by a surgeon, he compared moral axioms with lancets and instruments ready to hand (III, 13). It was a policy, maybe, of Phariseeism or Legalism, and therefore open to certain objections that had been announced a century before; but it was Phariseeism at its freshest, it was Legalism rooted in living principles, particularly the superb principle of the Unity or Brotherhood of Mankind. And in any case, Marcus, in the *Meditations*, was not legislating for others; and the most enthusiastic individualist in morals will not, I imagine, deny a man the right to legislate *for himself*, and even to exhort himself, if he chooses to do so. It may be eccentric, it may be old-fashioned; but it seems to have worked well in the

## Marcus Aurelius

case of Marcus, and his moralizings help men even to-day.

However, I have been merciful to the reader, and have stopped short before doubling the Decalogue by reaching the number twenty; but it was really necessary to convey the impression of Stoicism as *a body of practical precepts of conduct, and of Marcus as an elaborator and practiser of them*. If the world has to-day no further need of moral precepts, Marcus becomes a figure mainly of antiquarian interest, and a quaint and pathetic one, unhelpful and perhaps reactionary. Yet, as I have said, he has actually been helpful, particularly to men of the most modern and disillusioned type; and I shall be surprised if the reader himself does not, out of the few simple precepts of this imperfect chapter, pick up one that will prove a blessed stimulus or a timely reminder in the pilgrimage of his life.

No! Marcus, though probably less under the sway of impulse and passion than any man in history, had no practical use for the doctrine that human instincts are so trustworthy as to need no training. True, he held to the Stoic doctrine that the soul was a spark of the divine, but it was a spark hidden in an earthly vessel, and it needed some fanning to bring it to flame and some protection from the gusts that might extinguish it. For a man to have been effectively *taught* by parents or professors was consequently one of the greatest causes of Thanksgiving.

Inevitably, therefore, Marcus refers (I, 4, 17) to the "good teachers" whose instruction it had been his privilege to enjoy. But the word "teacher" must not mislead. In spite of a phrase or two to the contrary, it seems doubtful whether Fronto, for example, had much to do with

## *The Personal Teachers of Marcus*

Marcus before the latter was made heir to the throne at seventeen. The lectures of another "teacher," Sextus the Boeotian, grandson of Plutarch, were attended by Marcus almost up to the time of his own death; it is clear, in fact, that we must not regard all his "good teachers" as standing to him in the relation of elderly schoolmaster to youthful pupil: some at least were teachers of his manhood, and some may have been hardly older than himself.

This could not have been the case with the man called by Marcus his "tutor" (τρόφευς), but unfortunately the name of this important person is, for some reason, omitted by his pupil.\* To him, however, Marcus attributes some important elements in his own attitude towards life; negatively his refusal to become a sports-fanatic at the races or the lists, and positively his devotion to worthy things. If ever our Ten Commandments and our Nine Beatitudes are to be supplemented or emphasized from the resources of pagan ethics, the four following maxims may well be added from the repertory of the unnamed "tutor" of Marcus Aurelius:

- (1) Love toil.
- (2) Have few wants.
- (3) Do your own work.
- (4) Turn a deaf ear to slander.

It is just possible that the unnamed man was Alexander of Cotiaeum, "Alexander the Grammarian," who was

\* Perhaps from the precedent of the opening paragraphs in the *Meditations*. Marcus refers to his grandfather, father, mother, great-grandfather, and tutor, and then, leaving the family circle, proceeds to give actual names of people outside the family: Diogenetus, Rusticus, etc.

## *Marcus Aurelius*

for a time tutor both to Marcus and to Lucius Verus and lived to a great age. This Alexander was remembered by his pupil for one particular life-lesson, quite conformable with (1)–(4), but distinct from them. As grammarian his concern was, presumably, more with language than with morals, but he was obviously not a pedant, for he taught Marcus “not to be captious, nor in a carping spirit to find fault” with people who used incorrect forms of speech. These people should be put right less by direct criticism than by the graceful introduction of the correct form into one’s own speech. Adding these two monitions to our list we have:

- (5) Do not be captious or pedantic.
- (6) Be considerate in correcting others.

It may be that the more familiar exhortation to love your neighbour as yourself would include these two monitions, but the human mind has its blind spots and we can learn something from our “grammarian.”

On the whole it seems improbable that the tutor of (1)–(4) was the same man as the Alexander of (5)–(6). If he was the same, we can only say that Marcus was so clumsy in arranging the paragraphs of Book I that his various teachers would have had very good reason to be “captious” with him. Besides, it seems clear that though there is a genuine spirit of Stoic benevolence in (5) and (6), it revolves round the particular matter of speech, not the larger problems of conduct.

Here we bid farewell to the unnamed “tutor” to whom so much, in the opinion of his pupil, was due. For, indeed, Marcus did turn out to be a “lover of toil” (*φιλοπόνος*) and a follower of the other precepts.

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The next reference in the *Meditations* keeps us still amid uncertainties.

About the time of his migration from his paternal home, when, in fact, he was eleven years old, Marcus made the acquaintance of the Stoic philosopher Diognetus. It is a pity we do not know more about the personality of this man—or these men. A certain Diognetus is reputed to have taught Marcus painting. Marcus says nothing of this, and it is not certain that the teacher of painting and the teacher of Stoicism to whom he refers are the same person; it is possible, in fact, that the relations of Stoicism and painting were as strained as were in later times those of Puritanism and painting. But we have the word of Marcus that a certain Diognetus taught him

(7) Not to be taken up with trifles.

(8) Not to resent plain speaking.

(9) To set his heart upon a pallet bed and pelt.

In addition to these austere rules of conduct Diognetus taught him not to believe in incantations and exorcisms (Christian practices), and (contrariwise) to become familiar with philosophy in the persons of three living philosophers of whom nothing more is known to-day than this mention of them. Diognetus also taught Marcus to write dialogues “as a boy.”

On the whole it seems unlikely that this man could have been identical with the shadowy Diognetus the Painter. Painters are not commonly dialogue-fans or lovers of the pallet bed.

The next name is important in more ways than one. Rusticus, Stoic philosopher, is said to have been somewhat reluctantly responsible, when *Praefectus Urbi* at



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Rome (the Parthian War then raging), for the deaths of Justin Martyr and six other Christians, an act which has cast a shadow over the fame of Marcus. But that event was twenty-five or thirty years distant, perhaps, at the time when Rusticus first came into the life of Marcus; there is, moreover, a slight doubt as to the facts, and the persecution was not, in any case, extensive or severe.

Marcus had a particular affection for Rusticus as the man who introduced him to the writings of Epictetus. So great was his respect that, according to Capitolinus, he would greet Rusticus with a kiss before any other man, and after the death of the tutor he honoured him with statues.

Rusticus, no doubt, accepted the various teachings of Epictetus and the earlier Stoics, back to Chrysippus and Zeno, and handed them on to his royal pupil. But he was no mere echo of Epictetus, and his figure emerges rather more definitely than those of any of the other teachers of Marcus except Fronto. For one thing, we are told by Marcus himself that he was often offended with Rusticus though never to extremities (I, 17), and there is a letter from Fronto which also suggests that Rusticus was sometimes obstinate on the question of the real abilities of Marcus, underestimating them at first, though full of affection for the youth and willing to sacrifice his life for him (II, *Fronto*, 37). Reading between the lines, we infer that Rusticus was thoroughgoing in his Stoicism and particularly impatient with every form of weakness, affectation, and insincerity. It seems that by the time Marcus was twenty-five, and perhaps long before, the maxims of the stern Stoic were prevailing in his mind over the exhortations of Fronto the rhetorician,

## *The Personal Teachers of Marcus*

who was far more interested in making his pupil eloquent than philosophic; at any rate we find Marcus at that age refusing to indulge in the pretty literary artifice of writing on two sides of a question as if it did not matter which was true (I, *Fronto*, 219); the life of a Stoic, he evidently thought, was not a life of sham controversy. We are expressly told in the *Meditations* that it was Rusticus who taught Marcus "to eschew rhetoric, poetry, and fine language" (I, 7), the very things for which Fronto cared most! Marcus had also to eschew argumentative sophistry (again, rather hard on Fronto!), likewise speculative treatises, homilies, and epistles employing affected language; had to avoid the temptation of superficial reading, too quick agreement with voluble speakers, and the ostentation of going about the house in robes.

Though the general impression conveyed by what we read of Rusticus is of sternness there was at least one gentler note in his teaching. Men were full of faults—even Marcus had far too many, we seem to hear Rusticus growl—but offenders should at least be forgiven when they repented. One had "to show oneself ready to be reconciled to those who had lost their temper and transgressed against one, and ready to meet them half-way."

Lastly, as Marcus gives Rusticus the credit for so much, we may accept the statement that it was this philosopher who taught him not "to pose ostentatiously as the moral athlete or unselfish man."

Omitting those items which apply rather to Marcus than to men generally we gather these maxims from the teaching of Rusticus:

- (10) Meet offenders half-way.
- (11) Keep clear of affectation and ostentation,
- (12) Be thorough in thought.

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A greater impression of charm is conveyed by the reference of Marcus to Apollonius of Chalcedon, another philosopher of the Stoic school. Unfortunately the man is shown in a different light (as "ill-mannered and avaricious") by some other writers, but Marcus—heavenly-faithful to the principle of praising what is good—found much to praise in Apollonius.

This philosopher was a living example of the truth that "the same man could be very vehement and yet gentle"; he was "patient in instructing others," and, though full of experience and facility in imparting philosophic truths, held this among the least of his gifts. He also apparently knew how to accept presents without either callousness or obsequiousness.

The next name on the list as given by Marcus is that of the already mentioned grandson (or nephew) of Plutarch. Sextus of Chaeronea was held in such esteem by the emperor as to act as assessor on the bench, and Marcus, when an ageing man, continued to attend his lectures. "Simply to be with him was delightful," says the emperor, and those who enjoyed this privilege "looked up to him with the utmost reverence." His household, says Marcus, was "patriarchally governed"; he was kindly, full of consideration, tactful, a master of all his passions yet full of affection and ready to praise. Though learned, he made no parade and was tolerant of those who were without learning or were unreasonable. As a teacher he taught a "life according to nature"—nature in the grand but vague Stoic sense—and was skilful in the discovering and marshalling of maxims.

It is pleasant but not surprising to know that a relative or descendant of Plutarch was so worthy of him.

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The name of Alexander the Platonist would convey nothing to-day except for his professional relation to Marcus. Probably known to him long before, he was sent for by Marcus in the midst of his Thundering Legion campaign, or soon after, to act as his Greek secretary. In this connection he taught Marcus a lesson which, all down the ages, has been hard to learn.

"Tell him I am busy: urgent business," is the constant plea of the man of affairs and the man of letters to the importunity of a suitor. And that plea is, in many cases, amply justified. The young aspirant for literary honours who would like an established author to read his manuscript, the person in distress who would like to be considered by the millionaire, has often to be cruelly turned away however meritorious his case and however benevolent the character of the man to whom he appeals. Talent and undeserved poverty are not the only human claims; great men and wealthy men have their routine of duty which would never be performed under a rain of constant interruptions. To say "I am busy" would be perfectly true and perfectly excusable.

And such a man as Marcus would be particularly tempted to use the formula. His health was not of the best; his heart was often with philosophy; and to be constantly disturbed in his ailments or drawn aside from his thoughts to deal with the petty claims and often the exacting irrationalities of this man or that, was a sore trial. Indeed, had his philosophy been any other than the Stoic, had it, for example, put the contemplative life above the practical, he would surely have used the defensive formula over and over again.

But Stoicism had taught him that men formed one great

City, and that every citizen should be concerned for the welfare of all, and should do the duties of his station. And it seems that his Greek secretary, alleged to be a Platonist, backed up the Stoic summons; at any rate, Marcus gives him the credit for what was probably his own long-established principle of conduct. "From Alexander the Platonist [I learnt] not to say to anyone often or without necessity, nor write in a letter, *I am too busy*, nor in this fashion constantly plead urgent affairs as an excuse for evading obligations." With a weary heart and perhaps a wry smile Marcus would turn to Alexander and say, "*Admit him*," or "*Write to him in this fashion*."

The gentle, courteous, grateful side of life is emphasized similarly in connection with the name of Catulus the Stoic. We recall (5), (6), (8), and (10); when, Marcus says, an unreasonable person criticizes us or complains to us, his protest should not be entirely disregarded; every effort should be made for a reconciliation. Further; one should

(13) Praise one's teachers.

(14) Love one's children.

Most amiable men will try to do (14) without the example or precept of Catulus, but at the time when Marcus was writing these words he may have known something of the character of his son Commodus and may have needed every reminder available to love, help, and be patient. How remarkably he tried to obey (13) this chapter itself shows.

There was a man named Severus who was connected with Marcus through marriage and is hence called a "brother." It is possible he was a peripatetic philosopher

## *The Personal Teachers of Marcus*

and, if so, he appears to have done full justice if not more than justice to his master Aristotle, for Marcus attributes to him a whole host of valuable principles of state. Aristotle's *Politics* and *Ethics* are not mentioned—the history of Aristotle's books and influence is curious—and on the whole the impression conveyed is that Severus was a very radical Stoic who advocated a state with one law for all, based on equality and freedom of speech, and under a sovereignty which prized above everything else the liberty of the subject. In fact Severus seems to have had a positive admiration for martyrs, Stoic or at least republican, and the names of Thræsea, Helvidius, Cato, Dio, and Brutus, are specified. Royalty does not commonly love the names of republican stalwarts, but Marcus was grateful to Severus for making him acquainted with the stories of the fortitude of these men. Love of Justice (implied in the above), love of Truth (with a balanced and firm regard for philosophy), love of Family, were all parts of the teaching of Severus, and, what is even more attractive as we read the buoyant words of Marcus, he taught these two other lessons:

(15) Cultivate an eager confidence in people.

(16) Cultivate openness of attitude.

Maximus the Stoic, who rose to consular and proconsular rank, was called by Apuleius a "very holy man" and is referred to several times by Marcus in terms of unusual warmth. It is clear that the life, sufferings, and death of Maximus were all part and parcel with his teaching. When illness came he showed a "perfect and indomitable soul" and even "cheeriness," and there was a beautiful balance of "sweetness and gravity" in the

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man; pleasantry, although not despised, was kept within bounds, and there was a serenity that nothing could disturb and a straightforwardness that gave confidence to everyone. Stoicism loses all its hardness of outline in the person of this charming man in whom goodness bore an appearance of spontaneity missing, perhaps, in the more austere Rusticus. Of his maxims we may select with eminent appropriateness:

(17) Do your duty without grumbling.

This almost completes the list of the professional teachers to whom Marcus admits specific obligations. But two names remain, that of an emperor whom he personally knew during the whole period of his youth and middle life, and that of a rhetorician and advocate whose reputation was once equal to that of Cicero, but who is chiefly known to-day because of his friendship with Marcus Aurelius.

## CHAPTER V

### THE GREAT EXEMPLAR

IN Chapter III I described in scanty outline the literary and philosophical currents in the world of Marcus Aurelius.

In Chapter IV I tried to represent, in the words and the spirit of Marcus, the pedagogic or didactic aspect of Stoicism. If my readers' liking for Chapter IV is as little as their liking for the *First Book of the Meditations*, that is unfortunate; but they have to face the fact that a professed Stoic had to be a moralist and a pedagogue, and if they do not like moral "maxims," "dogmas," or "axioms" it is useless to deny that Marcus was fond of them. It may be a pity but it is true.

Still, even a reader who has had the patience to struggle through the preceding chapter and to win some appreciation of the standpoint of Marcus may be inclined to ask, with Renan: "How did these respectable pedagogues, none of them of any consequence (could Renan have been sure of this?) succeed in forming such a man as Marcus Aurelius? . . . An education so overdone might have turned out the very worst." Renan supplies a part, at least, of the answer. "To speak the truth, . . . Marcus had a single master whom he revered above them all; and that was Antoninus. . . . It was because Marcus had by his side the most beautiful model of a perfect life, and one whom he understood and loved, that he became what he was."

Half-way through the *Meditations*, recalling the sacred



figure of his predecessor, Marcus gave this advice to himself:

See thou be not *Caesarified*, nor take that dye, for there is the possibility. So keep thyself a simple and good man, uncorrupt, dignified, plain, a friend of justice, godfearing, gracious, affectionate, manful in doing thy duty. Strive to be always such as philosophy minded to make thee. Revere the Gods, save men.\* Life is short. This only is the harvest of earthly existence, a righteous disposition and social acts.

Do all things as a disciple of Antoninus. Think of his constancy in every act rationally undertaken, his invariable equability, his piety, his serenity of countenance, his sweetness of disposition, his contempt for the bubble of fame, and his zeal for getting a true grip of affairs. How he would never on any account dismiss a thing until he had first thoroughly scrutinized and clearly conceived it; how he put up with those who found fault with him unfairly, finding no fault with them in return; how he was never in a hurry; how he gave no ear to slander, and with what nicety he tested dispositions and acts; was no imputer of blame, and no craven, not a suspicious man, not a sophist, what little sufficed him whether for lodging or bed, dress, food, or attendance; how fond he was of work, and how long-suffering; how he would remain the whole day at the same occupation, owing to his spare diet . . ., and how loyal he was to his friends and always the same; and his forbearance towards those who openly opposed his views, and his pleasure when anyone pointed out something better; and how godfearing he was and yet not given to superstition. Take heed to all this, that thy last hour come upon thee as much at peace with thy conscience as he was (VI, 30).

Such was the first sketch of that famous, beautiful, and touching eulogy of his predecessor which Marcus ultimately prefaced to his *Meditations*. This begins:

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\* "Mankind" is the Loeb translation. The original is in the plural, ἀνθρώπους.

## *The Great Exemplar*

From my [adoptive] father [I had an example of] mildness and an unshakable adherence to decisions deliberately come to; and no empty vanity in respect to so-called honours; and a love of work and thoroughness; and a readiness to hear any suggestions for the common good; and an inflexible determination to give every man his due; and to know by experience when it is the time to insist and when to desist; and to suppress all [perverted] passion.

And his public spirit, and his not at all requiring his friends to sup with him or necessarily attend him abroad, and their always finding him the same when any urgent affairs had kept them away; and the spirit of thorough investigation and his perseverance; nay his never desisting prematurely from an enquiry on the strength of off-hand impressions; and his faculty for keeping his friends and never being bored with them; and his self-reliance in every emergency, and his good humour; and his habit of looking ahead and making provision for the smallest details without any heroics.

And his restricting in his reign public acclamations and every sort of adulation; and his unsleeping attention to the needs of the empire, and his wise stewardship of its resources, and his patient tolerance of the censure that all this entailed and his freedom from superstition with respect to the Gods and from hunting for popularity with respect to men by pandering to their desires or by courting the mob: yea his soberness in all things and steadfastness; and the absence in him of all vulgar tastes and any craze for novelty.

And the example that he gave of utilizing without pride, and at the same time without any apology, all the lavish gifts of Fortune that contribute towards the comfort of life, so as to enjoy them when present, as a matter of course, and when absent, not to miss them: and no one could charge him with sophistry, flippancy or pedantry; but he was a man mature, complete, deaf to flattery, able to preside over his own affairs and those of others.

Besides this also was his high appreciation of all true philosophers without any upbraiding of the others, and at

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the same time without any undue subservience to them; then again his easiness of access and his graciousness that yet had nothing fulsome about it; and his reasonable attention to his bodily requirements, not as one too fond of life, or vain of his outward appearance, nor yet as one who neglected it, but so as by his own carefulness to need but very seldom the skill of the leech or medicines and outward applications.

But most of all a readiness to acknowledge without jealousy the claims of those who were endowed with any especial gift, such as eloquence or knowledge of law or ethics or any other subject, and to give them active support, that each might gain the honour to which his individual eminence entitled him; and his loyalty to constitutional precedent without any parade of the fact that it was according to precedent.

Furthermore he was not prone to change or vacillation, but attached to the same places and the same things; and after his spasms of violent headache he would come back at once to his usual employments with renewed vigour; and his secrets were not many but very few and at very rare intervals, and then only political secrets; and he shewed good sense and moderation in his management of public spectacles, and in the construction of public works, and in *congiaria* and the like, as a man who had an eye to what had to be done and not to the credit to be gained thereby.

He did not bathe at all hours; he did not build for the love of building; he gave no thought to his food, or to the texture or colour of his clothes, or the comeliness of his slaves. His robe came up from *Lorium*, his country seat in the plains, and *Lanuvium* supplied his wants for the most part. Think of how he dealt with the customs' officer at *Tusculum* when the latter apologized, and it was a type of his usual conduct.

There was nothing rude in him, nor yet overbearing or violent nor carried as the phrase goes, "To the sweating state"; but everything was considered separately, as by a man of ample leisure, calmly, methodically, manfully, consistently. One might apply to him what is told of *Socrates*, that he was able to abstain from or enjoy those things that

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many are not strong enough to refrain from and too much inclined to enjoy. But to have the strength to persist in the one case and be abstemious in the other is characteristic of a man who has a perfect and indomitable soul, as was seen in the illness of Maximus.

Has ever man been so praised as this? Laudatory generalities, doubtless, have been lavished on many great rulers, and it may be that if a chronicler with the same desire to record everything good and with the same opportunities as Marcus had busied himself with Alfred the Great the record would not fall much short of this eulogy. Alfred had his Asser and St. Louis his Joinville and Akbar his Abul Fazl, but there is, I think, actually no other such eulogy, or even an approach to it, in existence—the work of a man on the spot through over twenty years, and no mere amateur in affairs of government but himself a ruler through nearly twenty years more.

“Until philosophers are kings,” says Plato in the *Republic*, “or the kings and princes of the world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils,—no, nor the human race, as I believe.”

It was a saying which, according to Capitolinus, was ever on the lips of Marcus. In his person and in that of his predecessor the desired condition of human felicity was actually realized, for philosophy and kingship met in their persons and they were willing and eager, in the splendid expression of Marcus already quoted, to “save mankind.” Plato’s other prediction that, while men are

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as they are, dictatorship will pass into oligarchy and oligarchy into democracy and democracy back into dictatorship in endless and wearisome cycles, seems so probable to-day that the companion prediction deserves all the attention we can give. *Either* philosophers as benign dictators, *or* eternal cycles of disappointment, *or* some vast invigoration and improvement in our educational methods—these seem the alternatives before the world. The first was tried for forty years, and the success achieved was at least as creditable as that of any of our later and more democratic experiments.

## CHAPTER VI

### MARCUS AND FRONTO

AFTER taking the admirable and momentous step described in Chapter II Hadrian became rapidly worse. His malady was of a dropsical nature and so distressing that he tried several times to persuade his attendants to despatch him; he even made attempts, it is said, on his own life. The quacks were found to be as useless as the physicians. It was in a moment, probably, of comparative relief from suffering that he composed the famous verses to his soul, addressing it as

Animula vagula, blandula,  
Hospes comesque corporis,

the poem to which Pope has given a Christian turn in his

Vital spark of heavenly flame,  
Quit, O quit this mortal frame!

One feels a little surprise that his adoptive grandson never quoted these verses in his *Meditations*. He owed much to Hadrian but, like other people who had known him even better, could hardly have loved that restless, inquisitive, ambiguous man.

Hadrian died in July 138, and Antoninus Pius ascended the throne without opposition though not without a hitch. Hadrian had not been popular, had never really been understood, and the senate, on the ground of certain of his severities, was inclined to refuse him the divine honours that were customarily voted to dead emperors. But this insult to a great though enig-

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matic and occasionally cruel man Antoninus would not suffer. If Hadrian had been so unworthy as the senate implied, what validity could be found in his adoption of Antoninus? The senate had to give way. But Antoninus was resolved to be no second Hadrian in the matter complained of, and he refused to begin his reign by certain expected and perhaps pardonable severities. The name of Pius was given him for this or some similar reason.\* It is said that during his whole reign he shed no drop of blood, which statement we must, I suppose, interpret in the sense of personal or voluntary shedding. Certainly he was magnanimous to a fault as was shown when he contented himself with banishing the scurrilous Peregrinus instead of taking his life.

Antoninus, as a man, is one of the best-known characters in history because of the eulogy of his virtues by his adoptive son and successor, contained in the first book of the *Meditations* and reproduced in Chapter V (above). But the course of his reign is by no means well known; for one reason, because peace is less full of thrilling detail than war, and his reign was, on the whole, one of peace. Indeed, the Pax Romana extended beyond the frontiers, and the imperial officers acted as arbitrators between the communities on the north side of the Black Sea, while the land still further east, whence came Jason's fleece and the ill-fated Medea, peacefully accepted a king at the hands of the Romans. It is true that Moors and Jews were restless, but the only serious military operations of the reign were in the distant province of Britain. A revolt took place in 140, and as a punishment the auxiliary Britons were transferred to Germany and

\* Capitolinus enumerates five reasons for the title "Pius."

employed to build forts near the Neckar, thus advancing the frontier. A similar advance took place in Britain; after some military successes the frontier, retracted by Hadrian, was again pushed forward to the Clyde and Forth, and defended by a wall with nineteen forts along its 36 miles. This was the work of Lollius Urbicus, the same man who, ten or twelve years later, when *Praefectus Urbi* at Rome, is alleged to have put some Christians to death; Antoninus himself appears to have been neutral if not benevolent towards the sect.

As soon as Antoninus became emperor, Marcus became, in terms of Hadrian's election, heir-apparent to the throne. The youth had been well educated already, but Antoninus decided that, in view of future responsibilities, it would be well to attach to him the eminent pleader, Marcus Cornelius Fronto, who had obtained much fame under Hadrian by his speeches, commonly eulogistic of the emperor. The reputation of the living Fronto was already scarcely inferior to that of the dead Cicero, and he was regarded not only as a model of forensic and political eloquence but as an authority on all the niceties of the Latin tongue. In the remains that have come down to us and are now available in an English form\* many passages (one of them quoted below) are devoted to minute and rather wearisome discussions of the appropriateness or the antecedents of particular words. But even though his effusive oratory and meticulous scholarship had not sufficed to commend him to Antoninus, his character was beyond reproach, and, in short, he seemed just the man to be of assistance in oratorical, literary, and administrative matters to the young

\* *Correspondence*, Loeb Edition, 1919.



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prince—or rather princes, for we must not forget Lucius Verus. Both princes, as we shall see, paid subsequent tribute to the abilities and influence of Fronto. His age was somewhere near forty when he undertook his interesting tutorial task.

One possibility must not, however, be entirely excluded. The important year 138 may not represent the first contact between Marcus and Fronto. It seems probable that Fronto had at an early stage watched the growing powers of Marcus and had done something to guide them. The arrangement made by Antoninus may be regarded as an official recognition that the future emperor was to receive the most systematic and perfect training for public life that could be provided.

It seems that the tutorial duties of Fronto were largely performed by means of correspondence, a method rendered necessary by the calls on Fronto's time in Rome and the necessity for Marcus to be near the court. In the palace at Lorium (some ten miles west of Rome, towards Alsium and the watering-places on the coast) Marcus had his own rooms; they were models of simplicity and indeed of bareness; and his mother remained with him till her death.

Fronto, now commissioned or recommissioned, showed no hesitation in getting to work. In a letter (I, *Fronto*, 3), which is probably the first in date of the whole collection, he explained tactfully to Marcus that total inexperience in an art (he is thinking of his beloved art of oratory) was better than semi-experience and half-knowledge, a statement which probably meant that there was nothing for Marcus to unlearn and everything for himself, the excellent Fronto, to teach. And as he already felt a well-

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grounded suspicion that Marcus loved Stoic philosophy a good deal better than Frontonian oratory or etymology, he gave a hint that superficiality in philosophy was all too common. Still, secretly hopeful that he might awaken in Marcus some sparks of that devouring passion for the right choice of words which animated himself, he pointed out that any verbal inappropriateness was detected promptly by educated outsiders; and unfortunately there had been, even among eminent writers, far, far too little care in seeking out the exact words they should use. Porcius Cato and his imitator Sallust were, in his opinion, among the best in this respect, whereas Cicero, though splendid in many ways, was never careful enough in seeking the *mot juste*. He reminded his royal pupil that sometimes a single syllable or letter might make all the difference, and he went on in the best school-master's manner:—

I have noticed when you were reading over to me what you had written and I altered a syllable in a word, that you paid no attention to it and thought it of no great consequence;

which may be taken as meaning, of course, that Marcus at eighteen had already a better sense of proportion than Fronto at perhaps thirty-five or forty; had at any rate an interest in facts as well as in words.

As illustrating the difference which may be made by one syllable, Fronto pointed out that you can say *os colluere* (to rinse the mouth) but not *in balneis pavimentum colluere* (to swab the flagged floor in the baths); in that case you may say *pelluere* not *colluere*.

This illustration hardly does justice, perhaps, to Fronto's very considerable common sense and humanity,

but it explains at once the difference between himself and his pupil. The interest of Marcus was already in the realities of conduct and duty, the interest of Fronto was to a considerable extent in forms of literary expression. Not that words can be judged unimportant even by the realist; Marcus was already too wise to be ignorant of that; but now he showed very little evidence of being thrilled by such distinctions as the one between *colluere* and *pelluere*. Still, with his magnificent power of seeing the best of everything and enlarging on it, he declared himself happy in having a tutor who taught how to *speak the truth*. Hard, indeed, he went on, was it for men, and even for the gods in their oracles,\* to speak the truth, and people were only too glad to interpret ambiguous words in the interest of their own wishes; he was therefore really grateful to Fronto for teaching him how to use words in the best ways. There is evidence, as we shall see in a moment, that Fronto was far from despising truth, but his prescribed task was essentially with forms of expression, and he, a man whose daily business was to argue on any side of a subject, was here found in the extraordinary position of having a pupil who, years before, had been hailed by Hadrian as not only "Verus," but "Verissimus." Plainly there may be difficulties ahead, though they will be mitigated by the sweetness of the pupil and the genuine affection and the diplomatic skill of the tutor.

Still, let justice be done to Fronto. Confusion of thought so often springs from confusion of speech, and exactness of speech is so definite a step towards truthful-

\* A point to be noted when we reach the story of Alexander of Abonoteichus, Chapter XVII.

ness of communication and of thought, that Marcus's words of praise for his tutor, even if they had come from a man of inferior scrupulosity, could well be taken at their face value. Many years later, when death, which had played havoc with the tutor's children was very near to the tutor himself, Fronto claimed that throughout life he "had spoken the truth studiously and heard it gladly" (II, *Fronto*, 231). What is even more striking is that the adoptive brother of Marcus and co-emperor with him, the Lucius Verus of whom the historians have so little good to say, declared in a letter to Fronto that he had learnt from him "simplicity and love of truth far before the lesson of polite phrasing" (II, *Fronto*, 119). So when all allowance has been made for verbal fastidiousness, of which there is plenty in the letters of all three men, there does seem to have been a recognition by Fronto that, though language ought to be beautiful and moving, it should also be honest and exact, and this lesson his pupils—both of them—definitely associated with his name and personality. It is therefore a curious fact that when Marcus wrote the *Meditations*, towards the end of his life, he praised Fronto on rather different grounds from this. He had learnt from him "to note the envy, the subtlety, and the dissimulation which are habitual to a tyrant; and that, as a general rule, those amongst us who rank as patricians are somewhat wanting in natural affection" (I, 11).

It is advisable to dwell a little longer on these early letters between the two. Though we can discern already the saint and philosopher of the *Meditations* in the young Caesar of eighteen, the note of noble weariness is quite absent. He is enthusiastic about everything, delighted

## Marcus Aurelius

to have so famous and capable a tutor, and especially full of Thankfulness—let us note this—that Fronto is willing to *find fault with him*. Before long his letters are addressed not to “My Master,” but to “My best of Masters.” He is “in love” with Fronto. Fronto is “the greatest treasure beneath the sky,” his “glory.” “It is enough to have had such a master.”

I would willingly devote the rest of this book to an analysis, with abundant quotations, of this correspondence, delightful “with the long buried fragrance of a famous friendship of the ancient world”; but one or two more specimens of its quality must suffice.

Herodes Atticus was an orator who had been a family acquaintance of Marcus and one of his many tutors. He was a munificent benefactor of Greece—he provided Olympia with a water-supply, for example—but in his capacity as citizen of Athens he twice fell foul of local feeling; the second time, much later on in our narrative than the point at which we have arrived, on a grave charge of sharp practice, and worse. Soon after Marcus was made Caesar, there came the trial of Herodes at Rome, and the accusing Athenians proposed to employ as their advocate no less a person than the famous Fronto. So here was Fronto, engaged in the prosecution of Herodes Atticus, one tutor and friend prosecuting another!

The young prince could not endure the prospect. “I love both of you, each one for his own merits, and I do not forget that he was brought up in the house of my [maternal] grandfather, and I educated under you.” Marcus does not ask, still less command, Fronto to drop the case or to refuse to reply if attacked, but he asks for

## *Marcus and Fronto*

moderation, and with this end in view he announces that he has also approached the opposite side (Herodes or his counsel). Now is the time for Fronto to increase Marcus's love for him, if such an increase be possible. Even if he, Marcus, should be regarded as "an ill-advised counsellor or a forward boy" he has felt obliged to write in the interests of friendship and peace.

People who hold that so saintly a man as Marcus must necessarily be a little weak in judgment and blind to the brutal facts of existence would do well to read this beautiful letter of a youth of about twenty. I know nothing equal to it in its combination of graciousness and common sense except the letters of Keats before his troubles began. Marcus saw clearly enough that the enemies of Fronto would gloat over his attack on Herodes and over the possible rupture with Marcus that would follow. Others would refuse to interfere lest they might seem friends of the opposite and perhaps guilty side. And Fronto himself, Marcus realized, would be disappointed if his well-prepared eloquence remained unspoken. But Marcus would rather seem to fail in judgment than fail in friendship.

The reply of Fronto does credit to him also. Young "Verissimus" is acting up to his reputation; his letter is "friendly, delightful, true." "Rightly have I devoted myself to you, rightly invested in you and your father [Antoninus Pius] all the gains of my life. . . . Away with your [talk about] 'forward boys' and 'rash counsellors' "; as if anything coming from Marcus could be childish or ill-advised! "In good sense you leave your elders far behind. In fact in this affair I realize that your counsel is weighty and worthy of a greybeard, while mine is

childish. . . . You may rest assured that I shall not go outside the case itself to speak of his [Herodes Atticus] character and the rest of his life. . . . Farewell, Caesar, and love me, as you do, to the utmost. I, indeed, dote upon the very characters of your writing."

Fronto did not retire from the case but Herodes was acquitted, let us hope justly, and later on we find the two orators good friends.

Another delightful episode gleams out from this group of letters. Salvius Julianus, the jurist,\* is ill, and Fronto, in the legal profession himself, pays him a visit at the request of Marcus—of Marcus, we must remember, twenty years old (possibly less), a young Caesar destined for the empire and, if he had been anyone else than Marcus Aurelius, full of schemes of ambition or popularity or pleasure. But no! He is personally concerned about Julianus, and when he hears that Fronto has indeed visited the sick man he is full of thankfulness. "Your staying there so long, having so protracted a talk, a talk too about me, or something to cheer him up in his illness, your making a sick man more comfortable in himself, a friend more friendly to me; then again, your writing out for me a detailed account of all this, giving in your letter most welcome news of Julianus himself, the kindest of words, the most wholesome of counsels, . . . what shall I say more except *I love you deservedly*? But why do I say *deservedly*? Would that I could love you as you deserve."

It may be asked, "The world of *women*, which must

\* He was selected by Hadrian to perform the gigantic task of codifying the law, and he finished this in A.D. 129. His influence on the development of Roman law "lasted for centuries."

have existed contemporaneously with this man-world of Marcus and Fronto, Herodes and Julianus, did that count at all in the life of the philosophic young Caesar?"

The *Meditations* bear witness that if Marcus ever had illicit relations with women they were brief, and that the virtuous character and precepts of his mother, who lived with him long after he became a Caesar, had influenced him greatly. Once Fronto refers playfully in the *Correspondence* to Lucilla's pretended jealousy on account of the affection between pupil and tutor, and there are constant greetings and remembrances in which both Lucilla and the elder Faustina are concerned.

What about the younger Faustina, whom Marcus married six or eight years after the accession of Antoninus?

History tells us how deep was the grief of Marcus when, years later, Faustina died. We catch early glimpses of her in the Fronto letters. "By heaven," someone writes, "I would sooner live with her in [banishment at] Gyara than in the palace without her." The vibrancy of the words suggests at first the young bridegroom Marcus Aurelius, and if he indeed were the writer we should rejoice, for he deserves all the happiness he will ever get. But it seems it is Antoninus Pius writing. The emperor had lost the elder Faustina a year or two before, but his daughter was still with him, was still unmarried, and was the joy of her father's heart.

Of another letter from Fronto we have only the opening words: "If Faustina's courage . . ." and we can easily guess the theme thus introduced. Before long she is in poor health, Fronto is praying the gods on her behalf, and Marcus reports that she is an obedient patient. Later letters contain references to the children as they



## *Marcus Aurelius*

come one after another, singly or as twins. Fronto bids Marcus "kiss our little ladies in my name," and later we shall get a reference, full of irony if only Fronto had known it, to Commodus. In short, so far as the Fronto correspondence is concerned it reveals Faustina as a delightful daughter and later as a beloved wife in the centre of a happy though rather ailing household.

It also introduces us to a second instance of the scrupulous and almost fastidious quixotism of Marcus in matters of money.\* Matidia, the great-aunt of Marcus and Faustina, had made them her heirs, but certain codicils had introduced an element of legal complication Marcus was inclined to decide against himself and his family. Fronto protests in vigorous terms. "You will rob the necks of your daughters of these famous pearls that they may grace—Whose goitred gorge, may I ask . . . Hitherto . . . you have shown yourself a just and weighty and righteous judge. Will you begin with your wife's case to give wrong judgment? Then will you indeed be like a fire if you scorch those who are nearest and give light to those who are afar off." To which Marcus replies that he has followed the two guides dearest to his heart, right reason and the opinion of Fronto.

We have not yet done with Fronto, but he has already helped us to see and understand our young Caesar as he faces the great life that is opening up.

\* For the first, see p. 47.

## CHAPTER VII

### MARCUS AS CAESAR

UNDER the system established by Augustus, the word "Caesar" gradually passed from a proper name to a title, standing for "prince" or at most "junior emperor." The word "Augustus" similarly assumed the meaning of a full emperor, endowed with all the powers and privileges of the principate.

Because of the importance of the Fronto correspondence as a revelation of the character of Marcus during the time of his Caesarship, and because, too, this correspondence is so little known, I have devoted the preceding chapter, without much regard to sequence, to some selections from it. Strictly speaking, the Caesarship of Marcus lasted eight years only, that is up to 147, when he was made consul for the third time and was given the Tribunician Power. From that date onwards he was partner or junior colleague of Antoninus until the death of the latter in 161. The eight years of Caesarship were remarkable for the number of laudatory inscriptions put up to him in many parts of the empire.\* The world felt itself happy in being ruled by such a Caesar as Marcus and such an Augustus as Antoninus.

In trying to understand the tremendous reputation for goodness and, indeed, for holiness which Marcus acquired in his own time and has never lost, we must not forget these twenty-two years of juniority. His actual reign was not very long—nineteen years—and half of

\* See Dove, p. 19.

it was spent away from the capital amid conditions that called more for energy than for saintliness. Further, an emperor of mature years may possess many proprieties and benevolences of character without gaining a reputation such as that which gathered round Marcus. We need not exaggerate; only, probably, during the very last years of his life, when the impending disaster of the accession of Commodus gave the Romans "furiously to think," was their affection for him intense: but years before that time they took his benevolence and clemency for granted even if they smiled a little at his virtues. (They had never read, we must remember, the *Meditations* or the *Correspondence*.) Marcus as Caesar had been a young man moving among them, and I suspect it was the correctness, reasonableness, unselfishness, and austerity of his conduct during that period, along with a radiant charm of which we get hints in the *Correspondence*, that were the basis of the great tradition which grew up. There is importance, too, in the fact that these years of juniority were spent at the very centre of affairs, mostly at Lorum or Rome, occasional trips to the seaside, not far away, being apparently the only interruptions.

Whether Marcus possessed a strong constitution is not clear. A weak body strengthened by physical exercise is perhaps rather more probable than a strong body weakened by over-study. It is certain that he took pleasure, for a time, in hunting the boar, and that he obtained some reputation for his prowess in this field; towards the end of his life he was to refer to boar-hunting disrespectfully, along with fly catching, brigandage, and soldiering. Capitolinus refers to boxing, wrestling, running, fowling, and ball-playing as among his recrea-

## *Marcus as Caesar*

tions, "though his ardour for philosophy distracted him from all these pursuits and made him serious and dignified, not ruining, however, a certain geniality in him, which he still manifested toward his household, his friends, and even to those less intimate." "Austere though not unreasonable," runs his description of Marcus, "modest though not inactive, serious without gloom."

The reader would like, perhaps, a glimpse of Marcus in his lighter moments; pallet bed and pelt are not much to the taste of a generation studying the "new morality" under the guidance of psycho-analysis and modern novelists. The intolerable suspicion may cross the mind that even when Marcus was hunting the boar or throwing the ball he was still all too serious, taking his pleasures sadly and from a sense of duty, and that he had not attained the heights of care-free imbecility expected by some popular standards. Fortunately there is a little evidence that Marcus in his days of early manhood could attain to real frivolity at times.

Thus there is his adventure with the shepherds.

Marcus, when he tells this adventure to Fronto, seems to be almost setting himself to meet the demand for a reasonable amount of naughtiness or Mowcherian volatility. "You see, dear Master," he seems to be saying, "I can be a silly ass sometimes! Picture me, already Caesar for four years, plunging into a flock of sheep and having a row with their keepers!"

Here, anyhow, is the story in the words of Marcus:

When my father [the Emperor] had gone home from the vineyards, I, as usual, mounted my horse, and set off along the road. . . . when I came upon a number of sheep

## Marcus Aurelius

in the road huddled together, as happens when there is little room, with four dogs and two shepherds; that was all. Then one of the shepherds, seeing our cavalcade, said to his mate, *Marry, keep an eye on those mounted fellows, they be rare hands at pillaging.* Hearing that, I dug the spurs into my horse and galloped right into the flock. Frightened out of their wits, they ran helter-skelter bleating and fleeing in all directions. The shepherd whirled his crook at us. It fell on my equerry who was following me. We got clear off. So it chanced that he, who feared to lose his sheep, lost his crook. . . . There is more I could write to you of that adventure, but here comes the messenger to call me to my bath. Farewell, my sweetest of masters. . . .

The reader will, I think, admit that there is nothing of the grave Marcus of later years in this episode. There is nothing, either, of the boy who had chosen on principle a comfortless bed. There is not even the delusional philanthropy which caused Don Quixote to charge into his particular flock of sheep. There is just a human creature actuated by a sudden boyish impulse; with a touch, as we say, of "devilry." We would willingly hear the rest of the story, but can in any case be assured that the crook was restored (or a better one) and compensation given for any loss of sheep caused by the prank of the young Caesar. Meanwhile we are glad that the story has come down to us. It shows that Marcus was not without his exuberances in these happy years of early manhood. And he jests freely about his sneezing, and snoring, and other incidental performances.

Yet the thoughtlessness of youth—imperial youth—towards seniority is wholly absent from these letters. He can even reach the sublime standard of putting up and sympathizing with the tale of Fronto's physical afflictions,

now rapidly increasing with age. Accounts of the tutor's rheumatism reach Marcus, news also about certain pains in Fronto's elbow, apparently distinct from that distressing rheumatism. Thoughtful and even anxious inquiries follow. Fronto had better rest more than he does; it is good to have now and then a really lazy time (advice which Fronto reciprocates). When the older man's birthday comes round congratulations and well-wishings are copious and fervent.

Someone has called Marcus Aurelius a "champion bore," or something of the kind, in ignorance of the origin and purpose of the *Meditations*. But champion bores are usually self-centred egotists. The correspondence with Fronto reveals Marcus—a young emperor at the splendid threshold of life—as the least self-centred man, perhaps, in all history. Every one of Fronto's ailments draws his sympathetic consideration, and once he bursts into prayer: "O ye kind gods, that are everywhere, grant, I beseech you, health to my Fronto, dearest to me and most delightful; let him ever be well, . . . and able to be with me" (I, *Fronto*, 83).

Yet I put it on record that Marcus could, perhaps, "pull the leg" of Fronto himself. That worthy tutor's ailments were interminable. Sometimes a whole letter (though a short one) consists of a notification and description of illness in some particular member of his distressful body. Doubtless many of these wearisome letters were written to explain an inability to fulfil some engagement; they are the equivalent of letters of excuse taken by a schoolboy after absence. But one feels he might have sometimes been a little less conscientious in detailing his various troubles, whether situated in

## Marcus Aurelius

Foot  
Shoulder  
Elbow  
Knee  
Groin  
Sole of Foot  
Hands  
Neck  
Eyes  
Fingers

and whether described (by translators) as

Insomnia  
Cough  
Sore Throat  
Lumbago  
Neuritis  
Rheumatism  
Diarrhœa

or by some other name.

Marcus, as I have said, was always sympathetic with the older man. But he must have been bored at times, and I fancy he once or twice resolved to turn the tables by giving an account of his own physical troubles. One can hardly reconcile on any other view some of his detailed accounts of them with the recorded Stoicism of the boy of twelve and the magnificent uncomplaining of the man of fifty.

One ailment of Marcus could not pass unmentioned in any case. Sleeplessness, with its consequence, over-sleeping in the morning, was apparently a lifelong companion of Marcus, as it has been of many students and thinkers; it is referred to several times in the *Correspondence*, and many years later the *Meditations* contain

an exhortation to the emperor by himself to beware of this particular infirmity. "At daybreak, when loth to rise, have this thought ready in thy mind. I am rising for a man's work. . . . Was I made for this that I should nuzzle under the bed-clothes and keep myself warm . . . ? *But some rest, too, is necessary.* I do not deny it. . . . But thou exceedest sufficiency." So he wrote as he contemplated the few years that remained to him and the many unaccomplished tasks of his life, above all the task of moral perfection.

Much sadness came into the life of Marcus, even, in the end, a desire for death; but life itself was full and interesting, as it always must be with a man aiming at self-improvement; he never knew the *ennui* of the profligate to whom the coming of every day means new boredom unless it can be forgotten in new dissipations. Marcus was spared that horror. If he overslept in the morning it was unwillingly; he had plenty to do in the all too short hours of each day.

Once, as a young man of twenty-two, relaxing for a moment amid the renowned sights of Baiae and the tales of Hadrian's death there many years before, he wrote a sort of *Essay against Sleep* (I, *Fronto*, 91-7), full of quotations from Homer and other poets and of the buoyant spirit that then possessed him. I quote the concluding words as a specimen of Marcus in his playful mood. "Enough of this trifling, which I have indulged in more from love of you than from my own faith in it. Now after soundly abusing sleep I am off to sleep, for I have spun all this out for you in the evening. I hope sleep will not pay me out."

Meanwhile the association between the older Augustus



## Marcus Aurelius

and the young Caesar was ripening into that beautiful friendship of which the literary fruit was the eulog in the First Book of the *Meditations*. Marcus had his frugal apartments in the palace of Lorium and was in almost daily contact with Antoninus Pius. He was familiar with all state affairs. The news of the successes of the Roman arms in Britain arrived during these early days of association, and soon afterwards the Wall of Antoninus (or more properly the earthen rampart now known as Graeme's Dyke and replacing the line of Agricola's forts) was joining the Forth and the Clyde, and, as we have read, a similar bulwark against the barbarians was advancing into the large corner between the Rhine and Danube.

It was about this time that the elder Faustina died. The Roman historians have not spared her, but Roman historians loved scandal better than they loved history. Her husband honoured her memory by making provision for orphan girls, an example followed by Marcus many years later when his own Faustina died.

We caught a glimpse, in the last chapter, of the younger woman in the palace at Lorium and of the delight of Antoninus Pius in the charms and the filial affection of his daughter. There is little doubt, too, that if we had more letters from Antoninus we should hear the tones of a deep happiness as he contemplated the virtues of his junior colleague. Everything pointed to a union of the two young people. In 145, or a year or two later, Marcus married Faustina, and if the reader chooses, as other people chose when the character of Commodus had set them wondering about the mysterious laws of heredity, to speculate on a subject where established scientific laws

## Marcus as Caesar

are few, he can recall the fact that it was a marriage of cousins.

Soon, as we have seen, Marcus was a family man. A daughter was born; doubtless as great an experience for Marcus as for any other father: we have in the Fronto correspondence the record of his anxiety on the occasion of his little girl's illness and momentary recovery: "Thank the gods we seem to have some hopes, . . . but the emaciation is extreme and there is still some cough." The hopes were vain, Anna Galeria Faustina died, and Marcus had, so far as we know from the records of his life, his first taste of ill fortune. Ten more children were born, more than half of whom, despite the attentions during a part of the period of the great physician Galen, died in very early childhood.

There are seven or eight references in the *Meditations* to the illness or loss of children, but before Marcus himself died he had learnt the bitter lesson that there were worse things than childlessness.

A boy soon followed Annia Galeria to the grave and then, in 148 or thereabouts, was born Annia Lucilla, whose strange fortune was to be married first to the emperor Lucius Verus and then to Claudius Pompeianus, to plot against her brother the emperor Commodus, and to be banished and put to death by him. According to Dio Cassius she was, at any rate in her later years, no better than she should have been. She stands in some contrast to her younger sister Cornificia, later a martyr to the cruelty of Caracalla, but that two daughters of Marcus should have been put to death by such (reputed) monsters as Commodus and Caracalla may be regarded as a tribute to them rather than the opposite.

## Marcus Aurelius

About this time the battle that had been taking place in the soul of Marcus was finally decided. Rusticus, Diognetus, and the rest of his Stoic preceptors are little more than names to us, saved from oblivion, in fact, mainly by the first book of the *Meditations*; while Fronto, thanks to the *Correspondence*, is a vivid and human personality. The sway of the former over the mind of the young Caesar of twenty-five now finally established itself. It may be that his domestic losses had given Marcus, never to lose it again, a further sense of the solemnity of life. What, in comparison with philosophy, was the value of the vaunted rhetoric that was Fronto's pride and delight? Fronto was disappointed at the desertion of Marcus, and he put up a fight, but the friendship of the two was unbroken.

## THE FIRST MONTHS AS EMPEROR

ANTONINUS PIUS died in 161 at the villa or palace of Lorium from which, during nearly twenty-two years, he had ruled a peaceful empire. It is possible that certain cries about "kings" which were heard in his last delirium had a reference to troubles on the far Parthian frontier which were threatening to break the peace. But he had taken all necessary steps to ensure the succession. Feeling his end approaching he directed that the Statue of Fortune, which stood in the reigning emperor's room, should be carried to the room of Marcus Aurelius, and then he performed his last recorded act and gave the watchword to the officer of the guard. That watchword was "*Aequanimitas*." Antoninus Pius was not a professed Stoic, but the word was dear to the Stoic heart of Marcus.

Pius had indicated, in a way that left no opportunity for doubt, his desires for the future government of the empire. Ambiguity was in any case almost impossible. Apart from the fact that Marcus had been nominated by Hadrian, was the nephew of Antoninus, had married his daughter, and was his adoptive son, Marcus had also been at the right hand of the emperor during the whole of his reign, and in the later years had been as active an administrator as Antoninus himself. He was thus marked out in the eyes of all Romans as the only possible head of the state, and was already deeply loved and widely admired. He was close upon forty.

But though there was no doubt about the succession

## Marcus Aurelius

of Marcus, there was some danger of another name being forgotten. Hadrian had nominated not one but two successors to his own successor Antoninus. It is hardly likely that he had contemplated a plan of co-emperors, Marcus as Augustus and Lucius as Caesar, still less a division of the empire such as was ultimately effected by Diocletian; it was primarily, perhaps, a gesture of courtesy towards the son of the man who had lost by death the reversion to the throne, and only secondarily a safety device to prevent failure in the succession through some accident of fortune. Anyhow, the provision made was ample; first Antoninus, second Marcus Aurelius, third, as a remote possibility for the consideration perhaps of some future senate, Lucius Verus.

But that provision had been made twenty-three years ago, and in 161 the senators and public of Rome seem to have forgotten the third name. History, too, has little to say about Lucius Verus in those years. About 145 he assumed the *toga virilis*, and soon after, as quaestor, gave a public show, and was seen seated between the Augustus and the Caesar. But that may have left little impression behind, and in 161 the idea of a co-emperor was probably as remote from men's minds as it had been from that of Hadrian, and the fact that Marcus had been the junior colleague of the very senior Antoninus, Caesar to his Augustus, was not regarded as a precedent for the joint rule of two men not very widely separated by age. Besides, though Marcus had as yet no son he had several daughters, and the arrival of another child, a son, if the gods were gracious, was shortly expected.

But such a view of the succession was not taken by Marcus himself. He was not, one repeats, on the roll of

common men, and "the difficulty in his case was not to disdain the things of earth but to care for them enough." He could not forget that when the thrilling news had come to him those many years before of his destination for the purple, a similar lot had been assigned to Lucius Verus; nay, that it was the death of the father of Lucius Verus that had led to his own preferment. In Roman ethics the concept of "playing the game" had not, perhaps, the significance and solemnity that it possesses in ours; nevertheless, Marcus resolved to "play the game" at all costs. He was the last man who would sully the purity and grandeur of a great occasion by an act of even remote injustice to an adoptive brother; he accordingly insisted to the senate that the empire was to be in joint hands. Perhaps, as Dio Cassius maintains, the apparent frailty of his own health in comparison with that of Lucius, was also a consideration; death, followed by a disputed succession, was the last thing the Romans wanted; moreover, there might be wars ahead, demanding the services of a robust emperor.

But Marcus went further than to press the claims of Lucius. He took the extraordinary view—he who had for twenty-three years been avowedly a junior to Antoninus—that there should be no juniority of rank in the new reign. Lucius Verus should not be a mere Caesar to his Augustus but should be an Augustus like himself. The difference between them in years and executive experience might carry weight, but in all other respects there would be equality. The reign would be the joint reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus.

It was a risky proposal. "The joint rule of two co-equal emperors must in most cases lead to rupture and dis-

## Marcus Aurelius

union, unless either (1) one of them were to keep himself in the background, or (2) the territory of the empire were to be divided between them into two huge provinces"—and the latter plan, recalling the precedent of Antony and Octavian, was itself no real guarantee of peace. "In the case of Marcus and Lucius," Professor Bury goes on to say, "harmony was preserved, because Lucius was good-natured, insignificant, and unambitious, and willingly left all initiation to his elder brother. If he had been a strong and energetic man, the harmony would have been as little imperilled, for in that case Marcus would have gladly resigned the chief conduct of affairs to him."

History does not say much in favour of Lucius, but it is to his credit that, despite the position which he occupied relative to Marcus, and human nature's notorious dislike of being under obligations to anyone, he was, apparently, always loyal and affectionate. If an "inferiority complex" ever developed in his mind—and I shall later produce some evidence to that effect—its results were not apparent in the relations of the two, and I shall be surprised if, at the end of my narrative, the reader does not feel an amused liking for the junior emperor.

A very few months after the accession of Marcus and Lucius an event took place which might have made another man than Marcus doubt of his own wisdom. Every classical scholar, and many who are not classical scholars, know how in the Fourth Eclogue of *Virgil* the coming birth of a child, fated to bring peace to the world, is greeted with exultation. In 161 there was no need to crave for peace, but the birth of a prince was none the less welcome. In that year of accession and of

## *First Months as Emperor*

generous thought the Empress Faustina gave birth to twin boys, Commodus and Antoninus. A story is recorded a century later, that Faustina dreamt that she had given birth to two serpents, but this interesting omen seems to have been unknown in the year we have reached: like many other stories of which history is full I fear it had a *post eventum* origin. Quite other seemed the omens of the time. In the entire history of the Roman Empire from the time of Augustus, no such auspicious event as the birth of princely twins had happened. Emperors were rarely the fathers of male children, and a prince born in the purple was a rarity, a happy presage, perhaps!

It must have seemed to the Romans as if the tide in this particular respect had turned, as if the gods themselves were smiling on the empire and on the tried and benign man who had recently given such a high proof of his generosity; and they may have whispered among themselves that the scrupulous plans for the succession which had given Lucius the co-empery had been an unwitting mistake. Marcus was not old; there was quite time for the twins to grow up to manhood before their father would die, and Lucius began to look more superfluous than ever.

Such thoughts probably passed through many minds in that summer of 161; they almost certainly did not pass through the mind of the senior Augustus. Yet it was clear that the existence of Lucius Verus might be, if not a peril to Marcus himself, a peril to the accession of the twins in the years ahead.

But, as Marcus would have been the first to remind the congratulatory Romans, the future was in the hands of the gods. Actually, death solved the double, the triple



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problem. The young Antoninus lived for only four years (the reader can read of his baby ways and coughs in the Fronto correspondence) and was thus saved from being the Geta to the Caracalla of Commodus; and Verus died eight years after his accession; the field was thus left open for Commodus as sole ruler and for one of the great tragic-comedies of history.

The reign of the co-emperors begun thus auspiciously was soon clouded by disasters. It has always been difficult to reconcile floods, earthquakes, and their like with the idea of divine government, and it was only a little easier for the Stoic than for other men. Nature and God in the Stoic creed were the same Being, and floods and earthquakes were presumably the doings of It or Him. Still, if such events were not obviously benevolent they were at least not personally malevolent, and in any case, not being within the influence of man's will, were simply "adiaphora," indifferent; mysterious perhaps, but not evil; simply INDIFFERENT; only things within men's power should be called "good" or "evil." In short, the Stoic solution of the Problem of Suffering was to call much suffering by another name.

In spite of some domestic losses, the life of Marcus had hitherto been free from tragic elements; it had been, indeed, almost a gay and joyous life, and public affairs had never seemed in a more favourable state. For a brief while after the accession, Fortune continued her favours, even lavishing on the empire the unique gift of princely twins. But then came one of those sudden turns in her wheel which remind us of the story told in the Book of Job. The favourable balance was suddenly redressed by a series of public misfortunes. And they continued.

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When, a few years later, the Parthian War was brought to a victorious conclusion and there seemed a chance that the peace programme of the Fourth Eclogue might yet have a topical value for these later times, there broke out the Marcomannic War; and soon afterwards there crept into the domestic affairs of the emperor a growing doubt and fear. Stoicism, with its doctrine that most of the troubles of life are "indifferent" and that human well-being is a matter of the mind and will, was put to a severe test. Incarnate in Marcus Aurelius it stood the strain magnificently; the barricade of principle held firm. No Christian, no Buddhist in all history, was more faithful to his convictions than the emperor upon whose head there burst in 161 a storm of troubles. Job was goaded to impeach God; there was hardly a whisper of impeachment in the case of Marcus.

But though floods and earthquakes were technically "adiaphora," Marcus could not be unmoved when, in the first year of his otherwise auspicious reign, Father Tiber flooded his banks destructively, a famine spread widely, and plagues of insects were experienced; and when, at the same time or perhaps a little earlier, the City of Cyzicus on the Sea of Marmora suffered a terrible earthquake.

As a reference to this event occurs in the correspondence between Marcus and Fronto we may well turn to those interesting documents and ask how the friendship between the two men was wearing.

Our enthusiastic rhetorician and advocate has only five or six years to live, and, poor man, has some sorrows in store, but we are grateful to him for supplying us

with this further mass of correspondence. And as the days of Lucius Verus, too, are numbered and he will die not very long after Fronto, we are glad that the last half of Fronto's correspondence contains a considerable number of letters to or from the junior emperor, raised by circumstances and the generosity of Marcus to an eminence he scarcely deserved.

It was natural that fewer letters should now pass between the Tutor in Rhetoric and his pupil Marcus. Tutorship had ripened into established and privileged friendship, and if Marcus was obstinately bent on preferring Stoic Ethics to Frontonian Eloquence it was now almost useless to protest. The Lord of the Roman World must be allowed to have his own way, and besides, he was extraordinarily busy, often to the extent of exhaustion and sleeplessness.

But the relationship continued to be a happy one; nay, Fronto had some cause for personal gratification. As Marcus was showing signs of being a great orator, the tutor's efforts had, after all, not been quite thrown away. Thus the emperor's speech to the senate on the Cyzicus earthquake and the parlous condition of the Cyzicenes contained many things that called for praise; just the right amount of appeal to sympathy, just the right amount of plain statement, and—O Joy!—Marcus had employed the figure of speech called *paraleipsis*; "while waiving a point you just mentioned it, and while mentioning it you yet waived it." In fact, wrote Fronto, "you now hold a most distinguished place in eloquence and will ere long reach its very summit." "Above all I am glad that you do not snatch up the first words that occur to you, but seek out the best."

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I do not imagine that there was a word of intentional flattery in all this. Marcus could be eloquent enough when there was a subject that inspired eloquence. He had often disappointed Fronto by his inability to be eloquent over trifles, to cultivate style for its own sake; but when a subject reached his heart, such as the condition of Cyzicus after the earthquake, the case was different; and if Fronto had only known it, the most eloquent letter of his own that he was ever to leave to posterity was to be one written out of the depths of personal sorrow. Still, there is no reason to begrudge the good man his pleasure in the rhetorical success of Marcus in A.D. 162. So receptive a pupil as Marcus had doubtless extracted all the best from the teaching of his master, and though no teaching will give divine fire to pupils incapable of such inflammation it can at least achieve some negative results in the form of the prevention of gross literary blunders or neglects.

Before closing the question of Fronto's influence on Marcus, one passage which carries us on in thought to John Bunyan deserves record for its revealing quality with regard to both master and pupil. The great evangelist was once congratulated on the eloquence of a sermon he had just preached. He replied, "The Devil told me *that*, before I had left the pulpit!" The kinship between the later Christian Puritan and the earlier Pagan Stoic is seen in the protest of Fronto to Marcus which dates from about this time. Fronto wrote:

"I have heard you say sometimes, *But indeed, when I have said something rather brilliant, I feel gratified, and that is why I shun eloquence.* Why not rather correct and cure yourself of your self-gratification, instead of repu-

diating that which gratifies you?" Fronto had probably sampled every variety of poultice, and he now remarks, metaphorically: "Acting as you do now, you are tying a poultice in the wrong place." And he points out that the fact of anyone's finding pleasure in doing good did not make the good thing bad. "If you gratify yourself by giving just judgment [in the courts], will you disown justice? If you gratify yourself by showing some filial respect for your father, will you despise filial duty? You gratify yourself, when eloquent; chastise yourself, then, but why chastise eloquence?"

He reminds Marcus that however much he may wish to live like one of the earlier Stoics or Cynics—Cleanthes, who drew water from the well, Diogenes, who despised money—he, Marcus, had to perform the duties of his office as emperor. Fronto's words rise to real eloquence because there is real feeling behind them:

What, will the Immortal Gods allow Rome, that echoed to the speeches of Cato and Gracchus and Cicero, to be hushed in this age of all others? The wide world, which was vocal when you received it, to become dumb by your doing? If one cut out the tongue of a single man he would be deemed a monster; to cut eloquence out from the human race—do you think that a trivial crime? . . . Philosophy will tell you what to say, Eloquence how to say it.

Fronto's English editor assigns, though with a question mark, this and several similar letters to the year 162, that is, to the year after Marcus became full emperor. An earlier date, when Marcus was still a subordinate, might be more suitable in view of the thorough scolding which Fronto gave the Lord of the World. But if we accept 162, we feel afresh the magnanimity of Marcus,

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to whom such free speech could be safely addressed, and the courage and sincerity of Fronto who addressed it to him.

And so the correspondence goes on in friendship and frankness, while, by some perversity of the Immortal Gods or the Nature of Things, public troubles crowded in on the philosophic emperor.

In this year serious news came from the East.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE PARTHIAN WAR

EVER since the triumvir Crassus had been defeated and slain at Carrhae (Abraham's Haran) in 53 B.C., the name of Parthia had awakened a thrill in the Roman breast. For the Romans to make any permanent impression upon the "ne'er yet beaten horse" of that "darting nation"\* seemed impossible. Mark Antony's lieutenant, Ventidius, might win victories (Gindaros, 38 B.C.) and celebrate a triumph, but a little later Antony himself failed disastrously.

The bone of contention between Rome and Parthia was generally the buffer state of Armenia which both of the great powers were determined to keep either in their hands or under their influence. But in the years following Carrhae, the recovery of the standards and prisoners lost by Crassus was a second and much more passionate desire on the part of the Romans; it comes out in the poems of Horace; and when at last Augustus got the standards back, not by arms but by diplomacy, both Horace and Virgil celebrated the event as if it were a victory of the first order; the Euphrates itself now flowed with gentler waves—for a time.

There were hostilities in the reign of Tiberius and much more serious ones in that of Nero when Corbulo showed himself a capable leader of the Roman arms and Paetus suffered defeat at the hands of the Parthians at Randeia (A.D. 62) near the Euphrates. At this same place, how-

\* *Antony and Cleopatra*, III, 1.

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ever, a little later, the Parthian king made some formal amends.

The next interchange took place in the reign of Trajan, who, indeed, resolved to remove the Parthian menace by conquest. As the eastern legions had degenerated in discipline his first task was to restore efficiency. Then, at Elegeia on the Euphrates—a place we shall hear of again—he met the Parthian pretender to the Armenian throne and rejected his claim (A.D. 115); Armenia was to be incorporated into the empire. Trajan then occupied the region that was formerly the heart of the Assyrian Empire and subsequently descended the Euphrates, capturing not only the ancient Babylon but also the capital of the Parthian Empire, Ctesiphon, from which he took away the famous golden throne. Descending still further, the old emperor almost set eyes on the Indian Ocean; memories of Alexander came to him, and at Charax, seeing a vessel bound for the Indies, he expressed regret that he was not young enough to visit them himself. But meanwhile the provinces rose in revolt behind him and Seleuceia and other cities were burnt to the ground in reprisal by the Romans. Then the desert began to play its part: Trajan failed to take Hatra, near the site of Nineveh; and making his way back he died at Selinus in Cilicia in 117. He had added three eastern provinces to the empire; but their future was precarious.

Hadrian reversed the policy of his predecessor alike in the west (Britain) and the east (Mesopotamia). Through a personal interview with the Parthian ruler, who was not anxious for a permanent quarrel with Rome, friendliness was established by a return of the king's daughter,



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captured by Trajan; and the frontier was retracted to manageable limits.

This rapid review has been given in order to suggest how large the Parthian question loomed in the eyes of the Romans. There had been too much of defeat at the hands of Parthia to allow them to keep their heads; the tiniest victory had a thrill in it, for it meant more than a victory over any other of the enemies of Rome. It was a case of Rome and Carthage over again but with greater equality in the parties, for though Parthia produced no Hannibal, and was, in fact, weaker than it seemed, it had the advantage of distance and the protective qualities of the Syrian desert. The prudent and pacific Hadrian therefore frankly accepted equality with the Parthian king.

When Marcus ascended the throne the king of Parthia, Vologeses, already, perhaps, grown restless under Antoninus, resolved to win back the buffer state which had so often engaged the two empires in conflict. Armenia was invaded and a Parthian prince placed on the throne. Severianus, the Roman governor of Cappadocia, uncertain whether he should advance or wait, consulted the most notorious oracle then existing in the Roman world, the one established on the shores of the Euxine by the impostor "Alexander of Abonoteichus." We shall hear much about Alexander in a later chapter, hear much and, I hope, thanks to Lucian, be amused. Meanwhile it is well to remember that oracles are generally optimistic (though sometimes sadly ambiguous), and the reply to Severianus came in a decidedly encouraging form;

Armenia, Parthia, cowed by thy fierce spear,  
To Rome, and Tiber's shining waves, thou com'st,  
Thy brow with leaves and radiant gold encircled.

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Severianus, accordingly, invaded Armenia and at Elegeia, the very place on the Euphrates where Trajan had years before met the Parthian claimant, his army was defeated and destroyed, the commander committing suicide. Alexander of Abonoteichus, as his custom was, expunged his oracle and declared that he had really announced,

Vex not the Armenian land; it shall not thrive;  
One in soft raiment clad shall from his bow  
Launch death, and cut thee off from life and light

The Parthians, after their victory, rapidly advanced into Syria and defeated, or rather routed, Cornelianus the Roman governor of the province, the soldiers fleeing at the first onset.

Such was the news that broke on the Roman Empire almost immediately after Marcus had ascended the throne.

Aggressiveness had been passing out of Roman military affairs during a peace scarcely broken by internal troubles with the Jews and by frontier troubles in distant Britain. There was even reason to believe that the bonds of discipline had been considerably relaxed in the army.

For a year or two the interest of the reign, and indeed of Fronto's correspondence, centres more around Lucius Verus than his senior colleague. New governors were appointed to Cappadocia and Syria, and it was agreed (162) that Lucius should go to the East and that Marcus should remain at the centre of affairs. Accordingly we soon hear of Verus at Canusium in Apulia, and there, in the neighbourhood of Cannae of unhappy memory, he fell ill—a "stroke," it appears, similar to that which carried him off seven years later. Ultimately we hear of

him at Antioch, now the base of the Parthian War, and of an attempt to come to terms with the enemy. Vologeses, flushed with success, "spurned the offer," and paid dearly for it (II, *Fronto*, 213). The front line moved forward ultimately to the Tigris and nearly to the Persian Gulf.

There was much to complain of in the discipline of the legions, and the generalissimo's own exploits were to be mainly associated in men's minds with Antioch in Syria, where "the licentious practices of Daphne's groves" proved, according to rumour, attractive. Capitolinus, at the distance of a century, adds further condemnatory details, some of which need not be believed, for it was too much the habit of historians to describe a "bad emperor" as "like Caligula, or Nero, or Vitellius." Verus, we are told, would disguise himself and wander at night through taverns and brothels and engage in brawls and rowdies; adulteries and love affairs with both sexes, and dicing the whole night through are other charges.\* It seems very unlikely that a young man eager, as we shall soon learn, for a great name, would have been utterly shameless and reckless during such a crisis in the empire's history, or that Marcus would have agreed, as he did about this time, that his daughter Lucilla should marry a worthless rake. (The marriage took place at Ephesus about 164.)

Still, if Verus was not a first-class man and did not contribute much to the victory over Parthia, Rome was fortunate in possessing three generals in the East who

\* He appears in a good class tavern on his return from the East in *The Street of the Sandalmakers*, Chap. IX. The sketch is slight, conventional, and not unpleasant except for Lucius's sneer at Marcus's piety. The reader may doubt that sneer if he likes.

## *The Parthian War*

had real ability. A second Verus, namely Martius, was a capable man, and Statius Priscus, the new governor of Cappadocia, was more than capable, and avenged the disaster of Elegeia by a vigorous advance into Armenia and the capture of its capital Artaxata. Even more brilliant were the achievements of the fierce disciplinarian whose name will ever possess unhappy associations with that of Marcus Aurelius. During the years 164-6 Avidius Cassius\* gradually overcame the Parthian resistance.

Victories at Sura and Europus (both in the great bend of the Euphrates, Europus being that Carchemish where the Babylonians overthrew the Egyptians nearly eight centuries before), and stormings or sieges leading to the capture of Nicophorium, Dausara, Edessa, and Nisibis gave the north of Mesopotamia to the Romans. Further south, in the famous region where Tigris and Euphrates approach each other, Seleucia opened its gates, and finally Ctesiphon, both cities being ultimately destroyed. It is said that four hundred thousand people were massacred at the latter place.

By the year 166 the military danger from the East was over, but another danger from the same quarter was causing ten times as much consternation as had been caused by the disaster of Elegeia. In one or other of these three desolated cities of lower Mesopotamia the Roman soldiers had been infected by the *plague*, and the returning army brought the infection home.

\* Avidius Cassius appears in the *Street of the Sandalmakers*, Chap. VII, at the moment of the return of the plague-smitten army to Rome.

## LUCIUS VERUS AND FRONTO

WE have seen how it came about that for a period of four years the junior emperor occupied a position of greater prominence than his juniority implied and his probable merits justified. In years and a kind of rude health the younger man may have appeared the better fitted for campaigning than the elder, a poor sleeper and eater, and, though a Salian Priest of the God of War, a man of notorious gentleness. Lucius, as we shall later discover, was certainly desirous of military glory, while Marcus, we may suspect, had long ago tried to empty his heart of this and every desire, and had well-nigh succeeded. We may also suspect that Marcus had a personal reason for remaining in Italy, namely, a father's delight in his two infant boys. He had watched little girls growing up and, advised at times by the famous physician Galen, had learnt something about childish ailments; but boys—and boys born to the purple—were almost a new experience for a Roman Emperor.\*

In 163 Fronto saw the two "little chicks" (*pulluli*) and reported to Marcus, who was away from home at the time, that he had never seen a more welcome sight. They were much like their father in appearance—later busts confirm this in the case of Commodus—and they had, it seems, "a healthy colour and good lungs," and Commodus, Fronto might have added, gave promise of good bulk in addition. "One was holding a piece of white

\* There had been, apparently, a previous male child, early deceased.

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bread like a little prince, the other a piece of black bread, quite in keeping with a philosopher's son." Their little voices, too, recalled a more familiar voice, and if Marcus did not take care Fronto would love them as much as he loved their father (II, *Fronto*, 119-21).

Such is the nursery picture that the old rhetorician draws of the princes, then about two years old, each holding in his hand if we cared to particularize such omens, the symbols of his fate, the white of an infancy cut short, the black of the world's hatred and contempt. The sentimental lines of Gray arise in an English mind:

Alas! regardless of their doom  
The little victims play!  
No sense have they of ills to come  
Nor care beyond the day;  
Yet see how all around them wait  
The ministers of human fate,  
And black Misfortune's baleful train!  
Ah! show them where in ambush stand,  
To seize their prey, the murderous band!  
Ah, tell them they are men!

The lines are, indeed, unusually appropriate, for one of the greatest tragi-comedies of history was a-preparing in that nursery. Young Antoninus has a couple of years to live, and his death will have its pensive echoes in the *Meditations*. Did not Apollonius teach Marcus how to be calm "on the loss of a child" (I, 8), and had he not taught himself, when he saw a child ailing, to go no further in needless fears, and not to say he is in danger until it is really so (VIII, 49)? And were it not well, instead of praying, *How may I not lose my child?* to pray, *How may I not dread to lose him* (IX, 40)? But of course

death may come. Leaves are scattered by the wind, and children too are little leaves (X, 34); yet did not Catulus teach Marcus "to be genuinely fond of [his] children" so long as they were there (I, 13)?

However that may be, Antoninus was to die in 165, while Commodus was to prove, there is reason to believe, a source of anxiety to his father as he passed from childhood into adolescence, and later, when emperor, a source of fear, loathing, and laughter to the courtiers who gathered around the throne once so philosophic and sober in its associations. And Dio Cassius was some day to tell how at one of the bloody freaks of Commodus, "many would have perished by the sword on the spot . . . if I had not chewed some laurel leaves, which I got from my garland, myself, and persuaded the others who were sitting near me to do the same, so that in the steady movement of our jaws we might conceal the fact that we were laughing." Men had laughed a little at Marcus, but had loved and respected him as they did so; very different was the ghastly laughter occasioned by his son.

But, alike for the courtiers, and for Marcus, and for Commodus himself, where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise, our poet reminds us; and in 163 Marcus replied to Fronto's letter in words that pulsate with two of the noblest of human emotions, friendship and paternal love. "I beseech you, my master, love me as you do love me; love me too, as you love those little ones of ours; love me as you have loved me" (II, *Fronto*, 121).

Yet he would not have been Marcus if, even at that moment, he had not thought of the concerns of others. Remembering the subject that lay nearest the heart of

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Fronto, he added, in reference to the letter aforesaid, "As to its style, what can I say? except that you talk Latin while the rest of us talk neither Latin nor Greek." And then he remembered Lucius Verus, still in Syria and possibly too familiar with the Groves of Daphne, though rumour may here have belied him; and though it is certain that he had a concubine it is equally certain that she was not only entrancingly beautiful but had such "nobility of soul," such "modesty, courtesy, humanity, and virtue" that Lucian had to write a eulogistic dialogue about her. Still, a letter to Lucius from Fronto, recalling all the affectionate associations of the past, might be of service to the younger emperor. "Write often, I pray you, to the Lord my brother." And then one last touch: "Give my love to your grandson." For Fronto, though his children persisted for the most part in dying, had a married daughter and a grandson or two, and a second grandchild might soon be born.

The curtain now rises upon a piece of undiluted comedy. Marcus, we suspect, wished Fronto to keep epistolary contact with Lucius Verus as a check upon a certain weakness in the junior emperor's character. And Lucius was, for quite another reason, anxious to correspond with his old tutor; so anxious, indeed, that he urged his wishes not only personally upon Fronto, but indirectly through Marcus. "Write to my Lord," says Marcus, "who promises many letters in return. . . . Add also other tokens of your affection and good nature, my master, for he rests on them as he has every reason to do" (II, *Fronto*, 129).

The truth may be—Labiche's comedy *La Poudre aux Yeux*, and hundreds of others, have been written around



this and kindred themes—that Lucius Verus was an example of a man suffering from an inferiority complex. Conscious both of weakness and of juniority, he wanted to be regarded as a man of importance, nay, if possible, as a great conqueror. Parthia was, as already said, the hereditary foe of the empire, and the smallest victory over her meant much to the Romans, and the mere fact of being *generalissimo* in the war against her and thus in the Crassus—Marc Antony—Corbulo—Trajan succession, was thrilling. The campaigns of 162–6 had turned out eminently successful owing to the abilities of Avidius Cassius, Statius Priscus, and Martius Verus. Discipline, it is true, had been relaxed, but strong men were on the spot—Avidius Cassius is said to have burnt his disobedient soldiers—and the outcome was some testimonial to the skill of Antoninus and Marcus in the choice of men. During the actual war the junior emperor had been in nominal charge, though no actual battle or siege could be, I think, put to his credit; and now that all had turned out well he was anxious, among other things, to celebrate a real royal triumph. His wishes did not stop there. Junior emperors had their critics who might say, and probably were saying, that after all Verus had had little to do with the success of the Roman arms. What he therefore wanted above everything else was a chronicler who would write the story of the campaign and give the credit, as far as possible, to himself. Fronto, once his tutor, seemed the man.

I have said, “as far as possible,” Let us be just to the imperial weakling. Lucius was a good-natured man and singularly free, one judges, from jealousy. There is no sign that he wanted the credit to be taken from the three

capable generals aforesaid. His letters are not unpleasant and, to say the truth, the fact that he was junior to Marcus was not an enviable position unless his Stoicism were the equal of his colleague's. In any case, the three generals would have to be mentioned with due praise. But Lucius's inferiority complex cried out for some share in the lime-light.

His first letter to Fronto is dated 162, after the apoplectic stroke at Canusium had been remedied by a drastic blood-letting. Fronto, after congratulating Verus on his recovery, recommends him to be sparing, temperate, and restrained in all his desires, which, after abstinence, may be more importunate than usual.

On which point we note that, according to the historian Capitolinus (less charitable than Dio Cassius, it appears), such advice as Fronto's was needed. Panthea with her aforesaid "modesty, courtesy, humanity, and virtue" had not yet, perhaps, risen above the horizon, and in any case Lucius was not a saint. We infer this, too, from between the lines of the letters of Marcus and from one significant passage in the *Meditations*, in which he expresses thanks that he had "a brother capable by his character of stimulating him (Marcus) to watchful care over himself, and at the same time delightful for his deference and affection" (I, 17).

In 163 there came a letter from Lucius written soon after his arrival in Syria. Exciting events had happened, including negotiations with the Parthian king, but nothing substantial had yet been accomplished and Lucius was not the man to write fictions. "What, Lucius to make pretences to Fronto! from whom I do not hesitate to say I have learnt simplicity and the love of

truth far before the lesson of polite phrasing" (II, *Fronto*, 19).

The words are honourable to both men, though perhaps Lucius doth protest too much. He excuses himself for a previous shortage of letters, and finishes with a sentence which some readers may interpret as the cant of a worthless rake picked up from a prosing colleague, and others as the sincere feeling of a young man lacking strong principle but not devoid of ingenuousness and good nature. "I present to you as suppliants in my favour," he wrote, "humanity herself, for even to offend is human, and it is man's peculiar privilege to pardon" (II, *Fronto*, 119).

Later in the year affairs improved in the East. Armenia was conquered, and the despatches of Lucius recounted his, or at any rate the army's, exploits in eloquent vein. Fronto was delighted as a Roman on account of the victories and as a teacher of oratory on account of the style in which they were narrated. The level of his own epistolary eloquence rose as his pride in his pupils gave passion to his words. "I have received, I have received, I have and hold a full return from you. I can now depart this life with a joyous heart richly recompensed for my labours and leaving behind me a mighty monument to my lasting fame. That I was your master all men either know or suppose or believe from your lips" (II, *Fronto*, 121).

One little hitch had occurred over the title of *Armeniacus*, which it was proposed by Lucius, blending egotism with generosity, should be assumed by both emperors. If the truth be told Marcus probably deserved the title as much as Lucius but he refused for some time

to entertain the proposal. The eloquence of the communications sent by Lucius—at least, Fronto says it was their eloquence, and Lucius had, in point of fact, some reputation as an orator—at last prevailed, and Marcus, to gratify his junior whose merits he seized the opportunity to praise in public, gave way on the point, and the title appeared on the coins until the death of Lucius a few years later.

By the year 165 the war was approaching its end. Fronto had meanwhile been collecting material for the history designed to glorify the exploits of the junior emperor. We have a letter from him to Avidius Cassius, that ablest of generals who was fated to be, ten years later, a tragic figure in Antonine history. Details of his campaigns had reached the would-be historian through Junius Maximus, of whom Fronto writes: "He never ceased till nightfall telling tale after tale of your (Avidius's) expeditions and of the discipline which you had restored."

About the same time came to Fronto a letter from Lucius himself making suggestions which raise the episode, as I have hinted, to the level of the comic.

Lucius will arrange that Fronto shall have all the necessary material for his book. Avidius Cassius and other generals will supply some information, the dispatches and speeches of Lucius himself will supply much more. And then comes this delightful passage:

One thing I wish not indeed to point out to you—the pupil to his own master—but to offer for your consideration, that you should dwell at length on the causes and early stages of the war, and especially our ill success in my absence. Do not be in a hurry to come to my share. Further, I think it essential to make quite clear the great superiority of the Parthians

## Marcus Aurelius

before my arrival, that the magnitude of my achievements may be manifest. My achievements, whatsoever their character, are no greater, of course, than they actually are, but they can be made to seem as great as you would have them seem (II, *Fronto*, 197).

Fronto took these and the other hints which were provided, and in the selections from his proposed history which he forwarded to Lucius that emperor's noble conduct at the head of his troops, his clemency (*bonitas*), and other excellent qualities, were duly set forth. The fame of other warriors in history grows a little pale as the deeds of Lucius Verus are set forth, though unkind critics have made the suggestion that Fronto's panegyric is to a large extent an echo of Pliny's panegyric of Trajan and Livy's description of Hannibal; in fact, that Fronto's "Preamble to History" (*Principia Historiae*) is more romance than fact. There is little doubt that he surpassed the expectations of Lucius, as when he refers to "those great exploits wrought by you such as Achilles himself would fain have wrought and Homer written." The times called for a man and lo! "there appeared one who was more warlike than all the leaders reared in the needy homes of Arpinum or the hardy ways of Nursia," by which he means such insignificant warriors as Caius Marius and the emperor Vespasian. Even Trajan had been relatively over-rated, for on his Parthian expedition he was in charge of veteran soldiers, whereas Verus had to create an army or infuse energy into troops long demoralized; and when this has been done his leadership was exemplary. "His table plain, his food the common camp-fare, . . . work is more to his taste than leisure, and his leisure he misuses for work," etc. And,

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unlike the lamentably over-rated Trajan, Lucius considered the lives of his soldiers more than his own military glory, amicably proposing terms of peace to the barbarian, who in the end paid dearly for spurning them, etc.

Can it be that Fronto knew or suspected that, despite his reputation amongst his pupils as an advocate of "truth," he here approached closely to the status of liar? Or was lying, in historical chronicles, a pardonable and well understood thing? He cannot plead that excuse. He is conscious that the charge has been made before now against panegyrists. Lying, he suggests, is an all too common practice in many walks of life, but "the lies of writers deserve a reprobation as everlasting as their memory." Unhappily, men are more prone to find fault with the living than the dead; with men like Lucius, he means, than with men like Trajan; and perhaps, if pressed, he would have said that a little piling up of praise could do no harm in the case of the good-natured Lucius. For all the evidence points to good nature and to an absence of real jealousy and touchiness on the part of the junior emperor. But he so wanted a little praise!

Did the work of Fronto ever have a considerable publicity? A few indications point to the conclusion that it did, and that in the closing years of Lucius the younger emperor had the gratification of knowing that his deeds, such as they were, had been adequately celebrated. What if unfriendly critics sneered, as probably they did? Had not Fronto pointed out, very truly, that heroes when alive were often the victims of envy?

One fact is at least significant. Lucian of Samosata was moved, about the year 165, to compose a little treatise on *The Way to Write History*. He was a specialist

in exposures ranging from the mild hypocrisies and self-deceptions of the philosophers to the flagrant and world-wide imposture of Alexander of Abonoteichus. A mind like his could not but be nauseated by the tone adopted by the historians of the Parthian War.

Was he thinking of Fronto in particular? I fear that he was, though there were plenty of other historians engaged on Fronto's task. "From the beginning of the present excitement—the barbarian war, the Armenian disaster, the succession of victories, you cannot find a man but is writing history; nay, everyone you meet is a Thucydides, a Herodotus, a Xenophon. The old saying must be true, and war be the father of all things, seeing what a litter of historians it has now teemed forth at a birth."

And the quality of their work? "It is the fashion to neglect the examination of facts, and give the space gained to eulogies of generals and commanders; those of their own side they exalt to the skies, the other side they disparage intemperately. They forget that between history and panegyric there is a great gulf fixed." Poetry is all right, but when history becomes servile it is nothing but "poetry without wings." Eulogy, too, has a certain value if it is not wildly false, and needless to say, "it may possibly please one person, the eulogized," but it will, unhappily, disgust everyone else. Is there anyone "fool enough to enjoy commendations which the slightest enquiry will prove to be unfounded?"

There is no clear proof that Lucian is here referring to Fronto and Lucius Verus, but his protests receive all the more significance when we know the nature of the correspondence that had recently been passing between

them. Was it the farcical note in contemporary history that led Lucian there and then to write the best-known of all his works, his *True History*, that *Gulliver's Travels* of Antiquity, in which, as he said, the only true statement was that the author was a liar?

But it is time to get back to Italy, and to pass from comedy to tragedy.

In this same year Fronto had occasion to write the most eloquent, or at least the most moving, letter in the whole collection of *Correspondence*. It must have touched Marcus deeply, though, as a Stoic, he had his philosophy ready, the philosophy of which Fronto had made hitherto such small account. There is no letter extant in which Marcus applies Stoic balm to the Fronto wound; it was his way to preach to himself more than to others; there is only the sympathetic cry; "Suffering as I do when a single joint of yours aches, my master, what pain do you think I feel when it is your heart that aches? Under the shock of the news I could think of nothing else than to ask you to keep safe for me the sweetest of masters, in whom I find a greater solace for this life than you can find for your sorrow from any source" (II, *Fronto*, 221).

Fronto had lost his grandson, and this was the culmination of a long series of domestic calamities. "I have lost five children, . . . all five separately, in every case an only child. I never had a child born to me except when bereaved of another." Hitherto his mind had made "a stout resistance." But this last blow touched both him and his son-in-law. "As my Victorinus weeps I waste away, I melt away, along with him. Often I even find fault with the immortal Gods and upbraid the Fates with reproaches."



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Marcus had doubtless contended often with Fronto that Providence governs the world; but the bereaved man could not see it. "Have the Gods, have the Destinies no power of discrimination as to what sort of man shall be robbed of his son? Victorinus, a blameless man, is bereaved of his darling son, and yet it would have been in the highest interests of the state that as many as possible of his kind should be born. Why Providence—out upon it!—if it provide unfairly?"

*Immortality?* he had heard of it, had thought of it: *Annihilation?* he had sometimes craved for it as the best thing: but neither hypothesis had much bearing on the present case. If immortality is true then it were well for us all to die as young children, like the little boy of Victorinus. The only consolation he, Fronto, could gather to himself was that his own death was now very near, and that on a retrospect of his life he had nothing with which to reproach himself. Marcus, too, we shall learn, will some day give a welcome to Death, but for a somewhat different reason.

We hear from another letter that Fronto's troubles were even greater than the one here lamented to Marcus. "In a few months I have lost the dearest of wives and a three-year-old grandson." Nevertheless, he struggles on with his literary commission, and there are some affectionate interchanges between him and Lucius. The old man, helpless with rheumatism, had been bodily lifted up and almost carried by the younger emperor, now returned from the Parthian War.

Here is one last characteristic touch. The kisses of Lucius compel Fronto to philosophize for a moment on why in greeting we touch with lips rather than with some

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other organ. What reason can there be except as rendering an honour to SPEECH? Speech had been the professional business of Fronto's life, and in this, almost his last letter, he cannot keep away from it.

Here we take our leave of him. There is reason to believe that he followed his wife and grandson to the tomb in 166 or 167 and left Marcus to an ever growing sense of loneliness. One after another the guides of his early manhood were dropping away, and the newer generation promised to be a somewhat unsatisfactory substitute. And perhaps some little doubts began to creep into his mind about the surviving twin.

## THE PLAGUE AND THE CHRISTIANS

AT what point in the reign of Marcus should the important question of the Christians and their alleged persecution by the Roman authorities be introduced and considered? Towards the end, perhaps, best of all, for then, it seems, something more than spasmodic outbreaks, localized Smyrna or Rome, took place. But a reference at this point is also convenient.

The Parthian War, though brought to a triumphant conclusion, left an evil and unexpected legacy behind. The returning legions brought back with them from the East the pestilence known as the Plague (bubonic, or perhaps smallpox), which, for some sixteen years (164-80), in fact until the end of the reign and a little beyond it, desolated the Roman world. One rumour attributed its origin to a dishonour done to Apollo's temple at the sack of Seleucia. Apollo had his merits, but he was a dangerous god to affront, as readers of Book I of the *Iliad* know; he had an unpleasant way, when offended, of employing pestilence; his son Aesculapius, as we shall learn, had a much better reputation in hygienic matters. Whatever the cause of the pestilence the fact of it was now all too patent; "people actually sickened at a sudden touch of the unsuspected foe as they watched in dense crowds . . . the triumphal procession." Galen, who in medical history bears a name second only in importance to that of Hippocrates and was physician for a time to the royal family, has given us a description of the

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pestilence, which was so widespread that, as in the case of the Black Death eleven centuries later, vast regions were depopulated and began to lapse into a wilderness condition. Economic relations were utterly upset.

The recent novelist of the period\* tells us that "above most of the doors [in Rome] were to be seen invocatory symbols: the sun-wheel of the votaries of Mithras with its characteristic spokes, the sacred insignia of the worshippers of Isis, the Jews' prodigal sprinkling of blood, the cross of the Christians, and over thousands of orthodox entrances the brief formula revealed by Alexander of Abonoteichos and sold by his agents throughout the realm.† If a deity had wished for one method of propagating his system, here, one would think, lay a marvellous opportunity in merely protecting his chosen. But none did so . . . . There was not one sect, or variant of a sect, whose adherents were exempt."

Yet sects and doctors were busy enough. "The pious and medically expert brotherhood on the Island of Aesculapius in the river, the priesthood of the healing Minerva, of Isis and Serapis on the Field of Mars, and not least of the sanctuary of great Jupiter himself, were always ready as intermediaries for the invocation of merciful aid against the hideous disease. But none was visited by so many as the Temple of the Egyptians . . . where was placed a branch office of the celebrated oracle"—the oracle of the aforesaid Alexander.

The Apollo theory of the plague was not the only one. Christianity was by this time sufficiently important to be regarded by some pagan observers, such as Celsus,

\* *The Street of the Sandalmakers*, Chapters XIV–XV.

† Below, p. 197.

as the most serious rival to the established religion of the empire; Christians and orthodox pagans accordingly accused each other of being the cause of the plague as well as of the accumulating troubles of the reign. Either the ancestral gods were angry at the toleration accorded to the doubtfully loyal sectaries (many of whom objected to serve the empire against its foes) or, conversely, the God of the Christians was angry at the stubborn unbelief of the pagans and their occasional persecutions of the faithful.

What are the historical facts about the alleged persecution of the Christians by the best of the emperors? There is something very tantalizing about them, as if the Muse of History were seeking to reflect a subjective conflict and bewilderment in the mind of Marcus himself.

It may be well to begin with the evidence, such as it is, of the *Meditations*. In that book we find some strangely anonymous references to certain "execrated" people, "torn limb from limb" by wild beasts. Now as these people were plainly not criminals but fanatics, there is hardly any doubt that Marcus meant by them the Christians, though the name itself never occurs in the *Meditations*, the only apparent instance being an ungrammatical interpolation. The passages which refer to the sect seem to be five in number.

In I, 6, we are told that Diognetus had taught Marcus "not to give credence to the statements of miracle-mongers and wizards about incantations and the exorcizing of demons."

In III, 16, we read of people "who do not believe in gods, [and] fail their country in its need, [and] do their deeds behind closed doors," and yet all the time think

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they are doing their duty and are, in point of fact, not mere slaves to their senses.

In VII, 68, we are told that it is possible to live in peace of mind "even though the whole world cry out against thee . . . and beasts tear limb from limb."

In VIII, 48 and 51, we are told that Ruling Reason can show itself unconquerable even if it take the form of mere opposition. "*They kill us, they cut us limb from limb, they hunt us with execrations.* How does that prevent thy mind being still pure, sane, sober, just?"

Lastly: Marcus urges that readiness to die "must spring from a man's inner judgment, and not be the result of mere opposition (like the Christians).<sup>\*</sup> It must be associated with deliberation and dignity and, if others, too, are to be convinced, with nothing like stage heroics (XI, 3).

The above passages are all; and, as I have said, they are anonymous—one could almost say "shy"—in their reference. To them may be added a more pointed passage from a speech attributed to Fronto in which the tutor of Marcus described the "incestuous banquets" of the Christians quite in the spirit of popular scandal. It supplies the key to the second passage quoted above.

Accepting all these passages as referring to the Christians, we note that Marcus disapproved of most of their ways, but could not quite conceal his admiration for their firmness and courage.

There is, I think, no reliable evidence, except in the last years of the reign, of a systematic reversal by Marcus of the tolerant policy of Trajan and Trajan's successors, but it is hardly to be doubted that Lollius Urbicus, when

<sup>\*</sup> The words in parenthesis are apparently interpolated.

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*Praefectus Urbi* in 152, put some Christians to death at Rome, that Polycarp and some other Christians suffered at Smyrna in 155, that Rusticus, when *Praefectus Urbi* in 163, condemned Justin Martyr and six others, and that in 177 there was a persecution at Lyons in which Pothinus and Blandina suffered; but two of these cases preceded the full accession of Marcus to the throne, and in two of them at least, the mob was perhaps more responsible than the officials. But some of the details are not quite established.\*

The reference of Marcus to "stage heroics" is important. In 165 or 169 there occurred that piece of "stage heroics" which set the whole world talking; the self-immolation of Peregrinus on a funeral pyre at Olympia. Peregrinus, as we have seen, was no Christian, though according to Lucian he was an ex-Christian, but there were Christians who, in the eyes of many pagans, had a similar taste for staging martyrdom; they belonged, it seems, mainly to the Montanist sect.

Marcus detested any parade of virtue and therefore had to blend his obvious admiration of the martyrs with condemnation of their apparent lust for publicity.

Other Romans were less generous. At a time when the manpower of the empire was seriously depleted by plague and other causes, there was a real sense of grievance against sectaries who "failed their country in its need" and had unaccountable ways and standards of their own.

It has sometimes been suggested that the fact of Marcus being from his earliest years dedicated to the heathen

\* Dr. Abbot has given plausible reasons for doubting the date of the Lyons martyrdom and some (e.g. Havet) deny the authenticity of the letter in Eusebius (recording the Justin Martyr story). Note in the Haines (Loeb) edition of the "*Meditations*."

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gods, and in particular to the god of War, may have made him a persecutor on quite conscientious and arguable grounds. It is unquestionable that if Marcus persecuted at all, it was avowedly on such grounds, and there certainly was, in several crises of his wars, an intensification of national piety, taking the form of solemn appeals to the ancestral gods. But was Marcus an orthodox pagan, a worshipper of the Olympian gods? If we were not in possession of the *Meditations* and now, of recent years, of the *Fronto Correspondence*, we might admit the high probability of Marcus becoming a persecutor on principle, and particularly a persecutor of pacifists. He was certainly "pious," and was sometimes named so, though less consistently than his predecessor. But it is clear that his piety was more of the Stoic than of the orthodox pagan type. The specific names of the gods meant little for him, and the deifications of the emperors perhaps less than nothing; are not the *Meditations* full of references to the mortality of emperors who were, now, flesh and blood and, now, ashes, even their fame passing rapidly to extinction? Though "deified" they were dead to all intents and purposes. His heart was far less with pagan legends and imperial mummeries than with the City of God, the Community of all living men. And certainly the god of War obtained from him somewhat reluctant (though yet faithful) service. Significant, too, is the fact that once, when a new temple was erected during his reign, it was dedicated to a very non-Olympian and non-imperial deity—Kindness or Beneficence.

For a real Stoic to "persecute" in the ordinary sense of the word was far more inexcusable than for a merely pious pagan to do so; the sect had been famous for its



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own martyrs and should have been chary of making more.

But Marcus, if I may reverse a famous epithet, was "unfortunate in the opportunity of his life." The peril to the empire and to civilization itself became suddenly so great that all the forces of pagan piety and tradition had to be rallied in defence. Accordingly, when war had to be waged Marcus shouldered the burden, and naturally expected others to do the same. If Christians "failed their country in its need" he could hardly regard stage-heroic martyrdom as a compensation for this failure. His references to them are therefore neither whole-hearted in condemnation, nor whole-hearted in praise; they reflect the ambiguity of his mind and of the imperial situation, and Christianity received at his hands and in his courts the verdict it has ever received from sane and honest judges; it is better than its enemies, and worse than its friends, allege.

But the actual extent of the persecution of the Christians under Marcus, and the amount of his complicity in it, though never likely to be satisfactorily settled, will have to be further considered in a later chapter.

## THE MARCOMANNIC WAR

THE Plague, serious in itself, was even more serious because its appearance in the west synchronized with the outbreak of the Marcomannic War.

The sentiments that animate the genuine pacifist may ultimately commend themselves as unanswerably wise to a clearer-sighted generation than ours. Certainly war, as the world is learning to wage it, is stark imbecility. But centuries ago the problem was a little simpler, uncomplicated by the existence of poison gas, merchants of death, and other modern developments.

Still, for a pacifist Pharaoh who had inherited the empire of Thutmose III, or even for a pacific if not pacifist Marcus Aurelius who had inherited the Empire of Trajan, Hadrian, and Antoninus Pius, the problem could not have seemed quite a happy one when the frontiers were broken by a foreign foe. Wars of sheer self-defence are a little different from wars of undisguised or even disguised aggression, though, to be sure, empires are empires and, however pacific they may be at a given moment, they must have done some fighting in their time. Akhnaton may have been cursed with wider and nobler ideas than his contemporaries, having discovered that there was a "Nile in Heaven" watering the whole world and not only the inhabitants of Egypt, and realizing that the Sun, equally beneficent, provided him with the symbol for a friendly and universal religion. Why indeed, he may have asked, should not the world

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live at peace? But alas! the North Syrian gates of the empire were being assailed by the Hittites who held other views about heavenly beneficence and international relations. What was a pacifist Pharaoh to do, especially at a time when his new religion had only just received its local habitation at Tell-el-Amarna and needed all the nursing that he could give it?

The historians tell us that Akhnaton, either in sublime faith or in imbecile folly, carried out to the bitter end his pacifist policy and refused to succour his Syrian garrisons, with the result that the Egyptian Empire collapsed, never again to be what it had been under Thutmose.

Marcus, so far as we know, did not profess so extreme a creed. True, the time would come when he would privately compare soldiering with the work of a spider capturing a fly and a hunter fighting a boar: "are not these [men] brigands, if thou test their principles?" (X, 10). The time would also come when, dying on the Danube, he would cry, in the presence of some tragic mishap, "Such is war's disastrous work!" But when the Parthians assailed the peace-wishing empire in 161, Marcus, though he did not take the field himself, had no thought of emulating Akhnaton and letting the enemy do what they liked with those very frontier provinces once inhabited or invaded by the Hittites. He may indeed have seriously doubted whether the warlike Trajan, with his dream of conquering Parthia once and for all, had not been in the right and the pacific Hadrian in the wrong; he may have recollected that his beloved Antoninus had pursued a moderately forward policy in Britain and Germany; and all thoughts of immediate

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pacifism were now banished when the northern frontier was broken down by a colossal irruption of the barbarians. Trajan, it will be remembered, had conquered Dacia, north of the Danube, after two fierce wars, and now Dacia itself (Roumania, Roman-land) was momentarily overrun. But the chief danger was not there but further west; Trajan's work was well remembered by the Roxolani and other tribes of the Black Sea region, and they kept quiet.

The northern frontier of the empire ran dangerously near to Italy along the line of the upper Danube (Rhoetia, Noricum, Pannonia), turned sharply south where the Danube itself turns south near the modern Buda-Pest, and then, near the modern Belgrade, swept north again to enclose Trajan's conquest. North of this frontier lay the tribes (from west to east) of the Chatti (Hesse and Franconia), the Hermanduri (Bavaria), the Marcomanni (Bohemia), the Quadi (Moravia), and the Jazyges (between the Danube and Dacia). These tribes had as little desire to war with Rome as Rome had to war with them, but pressure was coming from behind, and quite early in the reign there had been an incursion across the Danube into Pannonia, and this, when repelled, was followed by an earnest petition of certain tribes to settle within the empire. That policy was, before long, to be adopted; for the moment it was declined. Meanwhile, further west, a certain Victorinus was fighting the Chatti.

So things remained for the moment, and it was fortunate that they did so, for the Parthian War now claimed all the manpower of the empire. Almost as soon, however, as Marcus and Verus celebrated their Parthian triumph (166), there came that sudden collapse of the Roman

frontier on the north, which made many Romans speak of "the end of the empire" and some Christians to say, in effect, "We told you so!" It was no ordinary frontier affair. "The whole mass of the Germans and Slavs collected slowly, and slowly the great mass began its forward movement. The Roman legions could not withstand the tremendous pressure and retreated. Panic spread over the whole of Italy. . . . It was said that the empire had never been exposed to so great a danger since the times of the Punic Wars"; other memories, too, those of Marius and the Cimbri, of the Gauls and "the day of the Allia," surged into men's minds. It was a presage of that later crisis in world history brought about by the nations "which the populous north poured from her frozen loins to pass Rhene or the Danaw."

In the present case they passed the "Danaw" all right, the tribes above mentioned (except perhaps the remote Chatti) all bursting into the empire, one multitude of them sweeping south-eastwards from Rhaetia and reaching Opitergium (Oderzo) ten miles north of the present Venice, and another laying siege to Aquileia at the head of the Adriatic.

The greatness of the peril, arising not only out of the multitudinousness of the enemy but also out of the depletion of the Roman population, led Marcus to take the most drastic steps. The gladiators whom he had often wished to abolish were given a new task and transformed into soldiers, to the temporary exasperation of the circus-loving populace, who cried, "He wants to take away our pastimes so as to force us to become philosophers!" But necessity knows no law, and not only gladiators but police-officers, slaves, and highway-

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men were given arms and sent to the front. Two new legions were created and assigned to Rhaetia and Noricum respectively, and, as we shall shortly hear of a "Thundering Legion," we may note that these two were called more pacifically the "Pious" and the "Concord" Legions. Money being hard to obtain in the impoverishment that followed the Plague, the imperial jewels and the furniture of the imperial palaces were sold. Most significant of all, it was not one emperor only who took the field in 167 or 168, but two, and their departure was accompanied by religious ceremonies of an unusually solemn and elaborate kind. The reproaches of pious pagans should have no justification, so the images of the gods were placed on couches in the streets, with food before them (the *Lectisternium*).

The peril to Italy was soon over, but the war itself was only in its beginnings. The invaders retreated before the advance of the emperors, the Quadi at last offering submission, the Marcomanni continuing obdurate. The younger emperor, whose desire for military fame had been sufficiently satisfied in the Parthian War, now wished to get back to Rome. But the pacific Marcus saw that in this case pacificism would be a mistake, and there was the further consideration that thousands of Roman captives in the possession of the enemy had to be released. He pressed forward to the Pannonian frontier and made Carnuntum (Haimburg) his headquarters. Peace was at last arranged with the Quadi and many captives restored. Rhaetia and Noricum were placed in the charge of Pompeianus (whose destiny was to marry Annia Lucilla, the daughter of Marcus, after the death of her husband Lucius Verus) and he, together with

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Pertinax (afterwards emperor for a brief period) cleared these provinces of the invaders. The Danube, from Carnuntum upwards as far as Lauriacum (Lorch\*), was patrolled by a fleet; at the latter place a large camp was established; and a policy of embodying barbarians in the Roman army was at last sanctioned and begun.

Though the Marcomanni and the Iazyges were still unconquered, Marcus felt that he and his colleague could now return to Rome for a while. It was at this juncture that the junior emperor died at Altinum, near the site of Venice. "Travelling fraternally in the same litter with Aurelius, Lucius Verus was struck with sudden and mysterious disease and died as he hastened back to Rome."

Lucius Verus was thirty-nine when he fell a victim to the same apoplectic trouble, it appears, as had assailed him seven years before at Canusium. He may, as I have said, have had the gratification of reading in completed form Fronto's history of his deeds, real or imaginary; but the Danube was as little to be associated with his name as the Euphrates and Tigris; the only river that the mention of this good-natured, vain, ingenuous man recalls is the Orontes.

Coins are extant bearing the legend *Divus Verus, Conservatio*. "For," says Walter Pater,

Aurelius, certainly with sincere distress, his long irritations, so dutifully concealed or repressed, turning now into a single feeling of regret for the human creature, carried the remains back to Rome, and demanded of the Senate a public funeral, with a decree for the apotheosis, or canonization, of the dead. For three days the body lay in state in the Forum,

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\* Not the Lorch near Stuttgart.

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enclosed in an open coffin of cedar wood, on a bed of ivory and gold, in the centre of a sort of temporary chapel, representing the temple of his patroness, Venus Genetrix. Armed soldiers kept watch around it, while choirs of select voices relieved one another in the chanting of hymns or monologues from the great tragedians. . . . Marcus went to gaze on the face . . . and was touched far beyond what he had reckoned on by the piteous change there, even the skill of Galen having been not wholly successful in the process of embalming.

Meantime, in the centre of the Campus Martius, within the grove of poplars which enclosed the space where the body of Augustus had been burnt, the great funeral pyre was built up . . . Upon this . . . lay the corpse, hidden now under a mountain of flowers and incense brought by the women, who from the first had had their fondness for . . . the deceased. The dead body was surmounted by a waxen effigy of great size. . . . At last the centurions drew near, torch in hand, to ignite the pile at its four corners. . . . An eagle, not a very noble or youthful specimen of its kind, . . . took flight amid the real or affected awe of the spectators above the perishing remains . . . and the fathers, duly certified of the fact by "acclamation," muttering their judgment altogether in a kind of low, rhythmical chant, decreed Caelum—the privilege of divine rank to the departed. . . . The widowed Lucilla gathered the ashes . . . when the last flicker had been extinguished by drops of wine, and [they were] conveyed to the little cell, already populous, in the central mass of the sepulchre of Hadrian, still in all the splendour of its statued colonnades.

Marcus, always better at eulogy than at condemnation (in which last art indeed he was quite inexpert) had framed his tongue to the utterance of all that he could say in praise of his colleague. Later, in the *Meditations*, when dwelling on the inevitability of death and the



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folly of lamentation, he wrote, "Does Pantheia now watch by the urn of her lord?" Pantheia was not Lucilla; the reader will remember her as the concubine of Lucius in Syrian days. She is one of the few concubines in history to have received the open admiration and eulogy of a great man of letters. Let us not misunderstand. A concubine was not a loose woman; Pantheia's position was at least as regular and honourable as that of Aspasia had been. The emperor Vespasian too, had taken a concubine after the death of his wife, and there is a late tradition that Marcus Aurelius did the same after the death of Faustina, though I can find no contemporary confirmation of the statement and do not believe it for a moment. However that may be, Lucian of Samosata gives us in his *Portrait Study* a description of the exquisite charm and surpassing qualities of mind and character possessed by Pantheia. If now in 169, she was watching at the urn of Lucius, and her tears were unfeigned—the reference of Marcus seems to testify to this—it says much for him, and Lucian expressly adds that the young emperor "deserved the affections" of this "superb woman"; whatever else he was or was not, Lucius Verus was "benevolent and gracious."

Peace to his ashes! Capitolinus said a century afterwards, "If he did not bristle with vices no more did he abound with virtues." Lax if not licentious in life, he possessed at least the two qualities just mentioned and much beloved of Marcus; let us call them "kindliness" (no cruel deed is recorded of him) and "open heartedness." I think he is an almost solitary example of a vain man in high place whose vanity did not pass over into jealousy and malice. Needless to say, his death supplied

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the historians, or rather the scandal-collectors, with an opportunity too good to be lost, and readers can choose as his poisoner either Faustina (the wife of Marcus), or Lucilla (daughter of Marcus and wife of Verus), or a person already known to the reader as Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, the eulogist of a few weeks later, the author of a book of *Meditations*, and the subject of this present book. Capitolinus impartially mentions all three hypotheses though scouting the third. I think that on the whole we will scout it too. A treacherous murder followed by loathsome hypocrisy in public were not things we associate easily with the character of the man named by Hadrian "Verissimus," and when we hear later on of the alleged adulteries of the empress Faustina and of the poisoning of the murderous Marcus by his son Commodus we may form certain opinions concerning the reliability and mentality of Roman gossip.

## CHAPTER XIII

### PROGRESS OF THE MARCOMANNIC WAR

WE would give much to learn the story of the Marcomannic War from the pen of Marcus, sometime Salian Priest of Mars, for he knew more about it than any historian could ever know. What Caesar had done for the Gallic War Marcus could have done for the Marcomannic if literary fame had been his desire. Or if, declining to be an historian himself, he had wished that a full and authentic record of its events should be kept for the information of posterity, there were abundance of would-be historians available; so many had busied themselves with the Parthian War that, as we have seen, Lucian ridiculed their number—"everyone you meet is a Thucydides, an Herodotus, a Xenophon"—as well as the fulsomeness of their eulogies of an imperial *generalissimo*. And there were able lieutenants on the spot, faithful friends of Marcus, and perhaps one among them could have been found who had the making of an historian: Pertinax, emperor for a brief time after the murder of Commodus, and once "teacher of grammar"; Bassaeus Rufus, who appears on the bas-relief of the Triumphal Arch along with Marcus; or Victorinus who, as Fronto's son-in-law, may have had literary ambitions.

But Marcus, unlike the deceased Lucius, had emptied his heart alike of literary and of military fame, and though his devotion to the cause of the empire's safety was as conscientious as that of Trajan, so little did he think in

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terms of war that the *Meditations* can be searched in vain for information about it, and, what seems to me extraordinarily revealing, there is hardly a trace of a military metaphor in all its pages. A man's metaphors, and to a less extent his similes, are eloquent of his breeding, his studies, and his thoughts.

There are, however, some indications in the book of the place of its composition.

The towns on the Danube that should be remembered by the student of this war are, from west to east, Loricum (Lorch), Vindobona (Vienna), Carnuntum (Haimburg), Aquincum (Buda-Pest), and Sirmium (Mitrovitz). We may note in passing that it was either at Vindobona or at Sirmium that Marcus was to die, and the fact that we do not know at which is some indication of the obscurity surrounding the war. The former place is the more probable, the authority for the latter being Tertullian, of *credo quia impossibile* fame.

We learn, however, with gratitude that Book I of the *Meditations* was written "on the Gran among the Quadi" and Book II "at Carnuntum." Some scholars, however, are inclined to place these two apparent postscripts at the head of the subsequent chapters, in which case Book II was written "on the Gran among the Quadi" and Book III "at Carnuntum." Where and when the rest of the *Meditations* was written is not clear, but it is certainly the work of an ageing man, and probably most of it was written somewhere on or near the Danube, during this war and the later one. Away from many of the amenities of civilization, Marcus put on record, not for future ages, of which he took no account, nor probably for his son Commodus, though this has been suggested, but just

for himself, the thoughts that should as far as possible guide him through the few years that remained. With a magnificent summoning up of his declining forces, he resolved "to begin at last to be a man while life was [his]" (XI, 18).

The death of Verus left the field open for the recognition of the said son Commodus. The boy had been made Caesar in 166, and now in 168 was eight years of age. There were, as we have seen, several sisters, all, except one, older than himself, and though Marcus had lost the twin brother of Commodus and there were other deaths in the family of ten or eleven children born to Marcus and Faustina, the emperor was able a few years later, in pursuance of his policy of looking at the best side of things, to thank the gods that his children were "not devoid of intelligence nor physically deformed." In the case of Commodus it was perhaps all that could be said, and if we choose we can discover an ominous omission in the praise.

Though a consecutive history of the war is impossible, certain episodes can nevertheless be indicated, nearly all of them pointing to the desperation of the struggle. Defeats of the Romans seem to have been more common than victories, though the net result was favourable to the empire.

M. C. Fronto fought the Jazyges from the side of Dacia and was slain in battle, and a similar fate befell M. M. Vindex. Then, in 174 or thereabouts (Lucian implies a date before the Aquileia disaster, which seems hardly possible) occurred the episode of the Two Lions cast into the Danube as a sacrifice to the gods; this is recorded below in connection with the career of the

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impostor Alexander of Abonoteichus.\* Defeat on that occasion was followed by victory of some sort over the Marcomanni and there exist coins showing Marcus and his army crossing a bridge into (presumably) the enemy's country. Marcus about this time took the title *Germanicus*.

Dio Cassius has preserved a few other episodes of no great significance. We hear of shouts rolling across the Danube from Roman captives on the hostile bank; of a sentinel on duty swimming the river and releasing them; of fights on the frozen river itself; of negotiations with this barbarian chief and that; of the admission of some barbarians into the empire. And the same historian tells the famous story of the victory associated with the "Thundering Legion," though not in terms to please his monkish translator Xiphilinus, who gives us the improved Christian version.

The Quadi had repented of their peace with the Romans and had again joined the Marcomanni. Marcus set a price of a thousand pieces of gold on the head of the new king, who, having been surrendered, was sent to Alexandria. Marcus, we note, did not treat his vanquished enemies as the Romans had treated Jugurtha and Julius Caesar had treated Vercingetorix.

During this campaign against the Quadi, Marcus and his army penetrated almost to the Vistula and were in a gorge or (as the *Street of the Sandalmakers* has it) "on a plateau" not far, it would appear, from the modern Cracow; to be literal, among the "Contini." According to Dio Cassius, the army, with locked shields, had been fighting immense numbers of the enemy, and was now exhausted and perishing for want of water. Neither

\* Pp. 194-9.

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advance nor retreat was possible, and the enemy, aware of the plight of the Romans, barred the way to supplies and waited in well-grounded confidence; the position was far more perilous than that of Cromwell at Dunbar who had at least the sea and the fleet behind him. As in that later case, deliverance came when all seemed utterly lost. "Many clouds gathered, and a mighty rain, not without divine interposition, burst upon [the Romans]. Indeed, there is a story to the effect that Arnuphis, an Egyptian magician, who was a companion of Marcus, had invoked by means of enchantments various deities and in particular Mercury, the god of the air, and by this means attracted the rain" (*Dio Cassius*, IX, 29).

Themistius, a rhetorician who, a century later, tried to formulate a compromise between Paganism and Christianity (the Christians proved much better at this task) attributed the result to the prayers of Marcus. "When the army was perishing of thirst, the king, raising both his hands to heaven, said, 'With this hand wherewith I have taken away no life have I implored Thee and besought the Giver of Life.' And he so prevailed with God by his prayer that upon a clear sky there came up clouds bringing rain to the soldiers."

Now the Christians told a third story—perhaps the second in time—and the fact that there was a certain legion called the "Thundering" or "Lightning" Legion, became mixed up with the story they told. (Actually the legion which carried the figure of lightning on its shields had borne the name for a century or more previous to Marcus Aurelius.) The Christian version may be given in the form told by Xiphilinus, who, correcting Dio, goes on to say:

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Marcus had a division of soldiers . . . all worshippers of Christ. Now it is stated that in this battle when Marcus found himself at a loss, . . . the prefect approached him and told him that those who are called Christians can accomplish anything whatever by their prayers and that in the army there chanced to be a whole division of this sect. Marcus on hearing this appealed to them to pray to their God; and when they had prayed, their God immediately gave ear and smote the enemy with a thunderbolt, and comforted the Romans with a shower of rain. Marcus was greatly astonished at this, and not only honoured the Christians by an official decree, but also named the legion the "Thundering Legion." It is also reported that there is a letter of Marcus extant on the subject.

Such is the Christian version of the story, and then Dio resumes the account of the marvel, and we see water and fire descending simultaneously from the heavens, the water on the Romans, the fire on the barbarians, and some of the latter, forsooth, wounding themselves in order to quench the conflagration with their blood. Finally, we are told that Marcus took pity on the enemy and was soon afterwards saluted Imperator for the seventh time by the soldiers.

Dio Cassius, it will be seen, can tell marvels quite as well as any Christian, though he prefers to attribute them to the god Mercury and his evoker, the Egyptian magician.

Another account of the event is given in the alleged letter of Marcus to the senate. The letter is spurious, containing among other things a decree that informers against the Christians should be burnt alive if they had no specific accusations of crime. Yet there are phrases in it that have a Marcian flavour. "It is likely that these



whom we suppose to be godless have a self-acting God entrenched in their conscience" (II, *Fronto*, 301-305).

This much-discussed story will come up once again\* in the course of our narrative but here, for the present, we leave it.

The reduction of the Quadi was followed by that of the Iazyges (175), and the emperor now assumed the title of *Sarmaticus*.

Pacifist though he was in the truest sense—the Triumphal Arch shows him lifting his hand with a protective gesture over the barbarian captives who are suing for mercy, and every historian regards the age of the Antonines as the greatest example in history of the supercession of nationalism and jingoism by a world-state—he may have foreseen the nature of the perils before which the empire would some day succumb. His principles and instincts probably drew him towards the policy of Hadrian, if not of Akhnaton, but his clear vision of the facts may have convinced him that Trajan and Antoninus had been right in their annexations. There is reason to believe that he contemplated the complete conquest of the Marcomanni (of Bohemia) and the Jazyges (who occupied the very projecting salient between the Danube and the Theiss; otherwise between Pannonia and Dacia), and the creation of two new provinces, Marcomannia and Sarmatia. As a temporary measure the defeated tribes were compelled to withdraw to a line ten miles north of the Danube, to receive Roman garrisons, and in the case of the Jazyges, at least, to furnish troops for the Roman army. In the future the Danubian frontier and the affairs beyond it were to be

\* Chapter XVI.

## *Progress of the War*

prime concerns of the provincial governors, and in practice the Romans were not above setting one tribe against another.

Even these elaborate arrangements did not suffice to assure peace, and after an interlude in other lands and at Rome, Marcus, we shall learn, will be called once more to face the barbarians.

But before hearing the cause of his sudden departure from the Danube in 175 we may cast a glance at one or two people who, besides the generals aforesaid, were with him during the years that followed the death of Lucius Verus.

Alexander the Platonist, for one, was there towards the end, summoned to act as the emperor's Greek secretary. The reader will remember that it was from this secretary that Marcus learnt the lesson, depreciating very likely his own natural graciousness, of not pleading the excuse of "urgent affairs" to get rid of the exacting and the importunate. The lesson thus learnt seems all the more significant when we realize how "urgent" were the affairs of Marcus, these being no less than the defence of the frontier against Marcomanni, Quadi, and Jazyges. Even when thus engaged Marcus sought to find time for the peaceful courtesies of life.

The empress Faustina is called the "Mother of the Camp" on the coins of the period. During a part of his long campaign on the Danube Marcus had with him his wife and one of his little girls. As his health was not of the best, and as he could not yet be spared from the front, it were well for him to be not wholly cut off from those he loved.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE REVOLT OF AVIDIUS CASSIUS

THE reader will remember that about 165, when the Parthian War was nearly over, Lucius Verus was corresponding with Cornelius Fronto about the writing of a eulogistic history of his achievements. There is no doubt about the authenticity of these letters, which are now happily available for the edification or the laughter of English readers. But a series of other letters, that have led astray writers such as Merejkowski and Nis Petersen,\* and have confirmed the idea that so saintly a man as Marcus is generally a little lacking in common sense and in discernment of character, are in a different category. The letters are found in II, *Fronto*, pp. 307-19, and the English editor of them says: "The fabricator of them was probably Aemilius Parthenianus, a writer of the third or fourth century." The fact that letters could be fabricated galore alike by Christians and pagans is important to remember whenever judgments of character passed by one party on the other seem to be involved.

In the first of these spurious though not infamous letters Marcus is made to announce that he had put Avidius Cassius in charge of the Syrian army, which was "dissolved in luxury"—wholesale hot baths and worse. Cassius was just the one to put things right, for he was a man of "the old Cassian severity and discipline."

\* Also Renan, Naber, and Mr. Dove (*Life*, pp. 166-170). These forgeries go counter to the idea of Faustina's complicity in the revolt. She appears as the enemy of Avidius Cassius.

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(The reader will note here something like a play upon words—a suspicious novelty in the correspondence of Marcus, but repeated in this group of letters.) Four years later, the war being over, Lucius Verus wrote to Marcus that he should beware of Avidius Cassius as a man “avid” for empire. (Another joke, not in the style of Marcus.) “He dislikes our whole regime, . . . he calls you a philosophizing old woman, me a profligate simpleton. Personally I do not dislike the man, but you must consider whether you are acting fairly by yourself and your children in keeping ready equipped for action such a leader as the soldiers gladly listen to, gladly see.”

Marcus rebuked Verus for his suspicions—one of the rare instances, if it was an instance, of his rebuking anybody. But nine years later he wrote to Faustina confessing that the warning of Verus had been sound, and announcing nothing less than the revolt of the said Avidius Cassius. Faustina in reply advocated severity “as you love your children,” whereupon Marcus expressed his counter-intention of sparing the wife and children of Avidius, “for there is nothing that can commend an emperor to the world more than clemency”—a very true statement but hardly in the manner of Marcus, who had long ago learnt not to think much of the world’s commendation. In short, though this correspondence contains a few natural touches, it gives itself away at so many points that it must have been composed long after the events with which it is supposed to deal.

But the events themselves were mostly real enough; the revolt of Avidius Cassius was no invention of Parthenianus or anyone else.

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The health of Marcus was not good, and, as we have seen, the letters to and from Fronto contain ominous references to sleeplessness and to its consequence, oversleeping in the morning; still, the general impression they convey is one of a cheerful if not buoyant early manhood. But as it was a principle with Marcus to make the best of things and not to complain, these cheerful letters must not be assigned too much weight on the question of health.

The disasters of the empire, which began almost at the moment of the accession of Marcus, may have played their part, by increasing the strain of application to business, in weakening his health, and it is hardly likely that the campaigns on the Danube did anything to improve it. He became seriously ill while on the frontier,—"an old man and an ailing," he calls himself in the speech reported by Dio Cassius, "unable to take food without pain, or sleep without care." The rumour of this reached the East where Avidius Cassius was in command of the Syrian army.

Merejkowski, influenced by Renan and the forgeries, suggests that Avidius Cassius, "an intellectual and cultivated man, who was at one time much beloved by Marcus Aurelius, convinced himself, as a Roman of the old school, that, in questions of administration, Greek philosophy could only be harmful to the empire. He called the emperor a 'good philosophical old woman.' A section of Roman society, and also of the people, sympathized with him." Hence arose a movement against Marcus as philosopher—almost the doting tool of philosophers, and certainly it is well to remember that though in later years the reputation of Marcus as a general was estab-

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lished, this was hardly the case at the moment we have reached.

There is another interpretation of the so-called revolt of Avidius Cassius. Avidius had doubtless often wondered to himself what was to happen in the event of the death of Marcus. True, there was the boy Commodus, but even if the boy had shown that he possessed something of the abilities and goodness of his father, boy rulers seemed of little use in the circumstances of the empire.

There were, as we have seen, capable men around Marcus on the Danube and in the East there was still Martius Verus, but in fame and actual achievement Avidius Cassius came first. He was accounted a brute, almost a devil by some, but of his abilities there was no doubt. His Parthian victories had made him almost a second Trajan in the minds of men.

According to certain of the historians, though their evidence is *highly suspicious*, that view was held by no less a person than the empress Faustina. She had borne many children to Marcus, and though there is no evidence that he had any ground for suspecting her fidelity, it is just possible that he secretly grieved at a lack of sympathy with his views. And Faustina may have reflected that if the ailing Marcus were to die, the fate of Commodus would probably be sealed. Putting the best interpretation on the alleged facts, we may assume that she wished to provide the young prince with a friend and protector in the person of Avidius Cassius; perhaps the protector might even be made co-emperor with the youth; and perhaps—who knows?—this co-empery might ultimately be strengthened by a marriage between Cassius and Faustina, who, we must remember, was not only wife of

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Marcus but daughter of Antoninus Pius and therefore, in a sense, empress in her own right.

Some part of this programme may have been conveyed in the letter which, hearing of the illness of her husband on the frontier, Faustina, now far away from him, is said to have sent to Avidius Cassius. Even if it was written there is no need to make it an infamous document. Everyone knew the year of the Four Emperors (A.D. 69) and no one desired a repetition of its tragedies. The question of the succession was not one that could be trifled with in the event of the death of Marcus; a single week's delay might be fatal.

The rumour of the expected death soon followed, for, as Dio Cassius says, "in such circumstances reports always represent matters as worse than they really are," or, as was the case with another Mark seventeen centuries later, the report of his death was "much exaggerated." The slumbering conviction of Avidius Cassius that he was likely to be as capable an emperor as the dead Verus, of whose merits and demerits he had been able to form a very good opinion during the Parthian War, and that he was also likely to prove more immediately useful to the state than the boy Commodus, would certainly have been stimulated by the communication of Faustina if such a communication came to him, for it would have given his ambitions an almost official sanction. Anyhow, the rumoured death of Marcus led him to a momentous decision. *"Immediately, without waiting to confirm the rumour, he laid claim, with the soldiers' support, to the empire."*

The news reached the Danube through Martius Verus, governor of Cappadocia, with whose name the reader is

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already acquainted; and we are told that at first the emperor kept the news from his soldiers while, presumably, he pondered on the next step.

At last he broke the silence, and there followed the speech to the army reported by Dio Cassius. Seeing that Dio, within a few years of the event, was a senator at Rome and that the speech, according to him, was a written document, there is little reason to doubt its substantial accuracy.\*

Lamentations and resentment, Marcus said, were of little use, though common and natural in human affairs. Things take their course according to the divine providence. But it was terrible for civil strife to arise and for a man whom he had held dear to have plotted against him. Is there any Faith to be found among men, any Hope remaining?

If it were possible, he, Marcus, would gladly invite Cassius to argue out the question before the army or the senate, and would retire from office should that course seem good. "For it is only in the public interest that I continue to incur toil and danger, and have spent so much time here beyond the bounds of Italy, an old man as I now am and an ailing."

But it was hardly likely that such a conference could be arranged, and therefore the appeal must be to arms. And though Cassius had a good reputation as a soldier, his army of orientals would never stand against western legions; besides, there were good generals on our side, Martius Verus for example.

And, after all, Cassius has probably acted as a result

\* It is, however, given in Greek instead of the original Latin, and is only in the epitome of Xiphilinus.



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of a false rumour of death and will repent as soon as he learns the truth. He will show reverence for me as well as fear of you. There is really but one thing to be anxious about. When the truth is known he may take his own life or be slain by another, and thus the greatest of all victories may slip from our hands. *What is that superb, that unique victory?*

There follows an answer that must be given in the original words of Marcus so far as we have them. It is possible that Dio Cassius, feeling the quality of the episode, has added a rhetorical, almost a histrionic touch of his own, especially in the middle sentence. But the spirit of the rest, if not the form, is absolute Marcus Aurelius.

The great prize of war and of victory, he says, is:

To forgive a man who has done wrong, to be still a friend to one who has trodden friendship under foot, to continue faithful to one who has broken faith. What I say may perhaps seem to you incredible, but you must not disbelieve it, for . . . there still remains among us a vestige of pristine virtue. If any be incredulous, the greater even on that account is my desire that he should with his own eyes see actually done that which no man would believe could be done. For this would be the only gain I could get from my present troubles, if I were able to bring the matter to an honourable conclusion, and show to all the world that even civil war can be dealt with on right principles.

Our Europe of to-day might well ponder over these last words. "Even civil war can be dealt with on right principles." It is fairly clear what, in the opinion of Marcus, those principles are; they are the principles of (1) conference and (2) recognition of the fact that the enemy, even if sinning greatly, may be sinning in some

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measure out of delusion or error. We to-day can see that the revolt of Avidius Cassius was really no revolt; Marcus was reputed dead, and a general cannot revolt against a dead emperor. And we can also see that hundreds of years later the nations of Europe are still obsessed by their own illusions, the one described by Norman Angell years ago and a dozen others. But the statesman does not seem to arise who will show the thing "*actually done which no man would believe could be done.*"

The sequel can soon be told. Marcus summoned the boy Commodus from Rome as now entitled to wear the *toga virilis*, made peace as soon as possible with the barbarians, refused any offers of assistance from the latter, saying that "the barbarians ought not to know of the troubles arising between Romans," and set out for the East. But there was no battle. It is true that Cassius, though "he never uttered or wrote anything insulting" to Marcus, does not seem to have made any attempt to submit; possibly he thought that things had gone too far. But his "three months and six days dream of empire" was soon at an end. Cassius was proceeding on foot, like the Trajan who had preceded him in the invasion of Babylonia, when a centurion Antonius rode rapidly past him and struck him on the neck with a sword. The deed was apparently done without concert with others, but when the blow was seen not to have been fatal, it was completed by the decurion, the head of Cassius was cut off, and the two assassins set out with it to meet the advancing Marcus. The sequel can be inferred. Marcus refused to see the trophy, directed that it should be buried, and pursued a policy of extreme leniency in the revolted provinces, of which Syria was the chief.

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The death of Faustina followed soon after, at Halala near the Taurus. If Marcus ever heard of her alleged letter to Avidius he did not allow it to influence him. It is highly probable that there was no such letter. In any case her death moved him deeply, and in memory of her he carried still further the plan of his predecessor who, as we saw, had established charity schools for orphan girls dedicated to the elder Faustina. A second group of such schools was established in memory of the daughter of Antoninus Pius and the wife of Marcus Aurelius. In addition to this a rich temple was left among the wild villagers at the spot where she had breathed her last—a temple designed to make the place sacred for ever. At Rome a golden image was put up where she had sat in the amphitheatre, and elsewhere an altar was erected at which the newly married might make their sacrifice. A strange altar if the empress had been the Faustina of Swinburne's poem and popular scandal! Never in all history was connubial harmony and satisfaction more glorified.

Felices ter et amplius  
quos inrupta tenet copula, nec malis  
divulsos querimoniis  
suprema citius solvet amor die.\*

Such unions have happened!

Was it all a pretence in this case, or at best an effort on the part of Marcus to delude himself? The matter will come up again, but for the moment Pater's words may suffice:

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\* Horace, *Odes* I xiii.

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The empress Faustina he would seem to have at least kept, by a constraining affection, from becoming altogether what most people have believed her, and won in her . . . a consolation, the more secure, perhaps, because unknown of others. Was the secret of her actual blamelessness, after all with him who has at least screened her name? At all events, the one thing quite certain about her, besides her extraordinary beauty, is her sweetness to himself.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE EAST AND HOME AGAIN

IT is possible that the happiest months in the later life of Marcus were those that immediately followed the events recorded in the last chapter. It is true that the death of Faustina plunged him into sorrow, the death of Avidius Cassius into regrets for what might have been, and the presence of the boy Commodus into perhaps the beginnings of anxious doubt. Hard though every Stoic tried to believe in providence and to extract comfort from that belief there may have been for Marcus some moments of failure. But one thing must have alleviated his pain or at least have distracted his mind. There were in the East many interesting sights which, so far as we can tell, had never been seen by him during the half-century of his life, and above all there were several famous seats of learning each calling for a visit. A Caesar's education was at home, not, like that of other youths, finished off at some Hellenic university, and now the collapse of the revolt left him in Asia and at some leisure to seize opportunities hitherto denied.

The three chief universities of the world at this time were Athens, Alexandria, and Smyrna. Each had been visited and magnificently endowed by Hadrian on the occasion of his travels many years before, and Marcus doubtless felt an added interest in tracing the steps of his "grandfather" and recalling the episodes still vividly on record.

There was, however, a considerable difference between

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the attitude of the two itinerating emperors. The earlier one had literary, archaeological, and historical interests which to Marcus, living with a constant sense of the transitoriness of human life, doubtless seemed a little trivial. Hadrian climbed Etna to see a sunrise; penetrated to Upper Egypt on another sunrise expedition to hear the statue of Memnon give forth its music; visited the Troad to see the sites of the ancient war, and the neighbourhood of Trebizond to stand where Xenophon and his ten thousand had greeted the sea after their long and perilous journey; stood reverently on the spots where Epaminondas and Pompey fell, and ordered memorials to each. True, he did not forget the philosophers and the gods; many new temples arose, one to Zeus at Athens, dedicated to the cause of Greek unity; and one at Cyzicus, planned on so enormous a scale that the whole of the succeeding reign of Antoninus did not suffice for its completion; most of the provinces of the Roman world retain to this day architectural records of the piety or at least the patronage of Hadrian.

Not merely had Marcus less time at his disposal than his predecessor, he had less of that inquisitiveness and versatility which distinguished Hadrian's character and was, in fact, a Greek more than a Roman characteristic. Marcus was more Roman than Greek, and perhaps, as I shall presently hint, he had still another affiliation. The opportunity of visiting the universities presented itself to him mainly as an opportunity to give public support to the philosophers and to draw from their teachings further spiritual sustenance for himself. Yet, as I say, there must have been some genuine interest in visiting the ancient lands in some of which, a few years

earlier, his junior colleague had directed, or pretended to direct, the course of the Parthian War. One almost detects a lifting of his spirits, something, in fact, of a holiday mood; and, after all, there was no Stoic principle which forbade innocent distraction when it came in the obvious course of duty.

If he had only realized it, he was now actually visiting his spiritual home. The Stoicism which was the ruling creed of his life was far less a Greek than a Syrian system. Zeno, who had founded it, was a Phoenician Greek from Cyprus; Chrysippus, the second founder, came from Cilicia, like the second founder of Christianity. Zeno might talk Greek in the Stoa at Athens and might rightly look back to Plato and Socrates, but there was a Semitic spirit about his philosophy; conduct, he might have said, as Matthew Arnold said centuries later, was "three fourths of life," and it was with conduct that Semitism, Hebraism, and Stoicism were mainly concerned. Science was rapidly dying, even at Alexandria; the only group of thinkers who cared in the least about it were the Epicureans, and the greatest of them, Lucian of Samosata, was devoting his talents mainly to the ridicule of the gods and the exposure of impostors.

Yet it seems that Marcus, as he traversed the Semitic provinces of the empire, was not at all drawn to the particular Semites he saw around him. If there was any spiritual kinship between them and him he failed to detect it. Not so some pious Jew, for in the Talmud there is an account of a friendship between the Rabbi Jehuda and an emperor, apparently Marcus.\*

Ammianus Marcellinus, the last of Rome's real

\* See Dove, pp. 192-205. Mr. Dove rejects the interesting story.

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historians, who lived in the time of Julian the Apostate and held that emperor in admiration, tells us that Marcus, when passing through Palestine, was "moved with disgust at the unsavoury and turbulent Jews," and cried with a groan, "O Marcomanni, O Quadi, O Sarmatians, have I at length found others more useless than you?"

If we accept this remark, reported two hundred years after its alleged utterance, it will throw some light upon the general attitude of Marcus, in the last years of his reign, towards the Jews and Christians. True, the Jews were not the same as the Christians, and on the whole they were at this time the more "turbulent" if not the more "unsavoury" party of the two; but doubtless to Marcus they seemed alike in respect of fanaticism and separateness, thus differing from the northern races who, though valiant foes, were often glad to come inside the empire and be transformed into defenders and "Romans." However that may be, in this same year (176) we shall find Marcus issuing an edict exhorting the magistrates to watchfulness against religious extravagances; and there is reason to believe that the nearest approach during his reign to systematic, as distinct from sporadic, persecution of the Christians took place in his last four years.

Alexandria was the second Athens of the empire, and we are told that Marcus, having arrived there, set aside all ceremonious sovereignty (he maintained very little in any case) and attended like any ordinary man the lectures of the professors. The tradition of Hadrian's visit of forty-five years before was still alive, and Marcus may have heard more than he had hitherto known about his "grandfather's" conciliatory benefactions to the city and about the unfortunate incidents which, despite



them, attended his visit. Marcus was probably less of an enigma to the Alexandrines than Hadrian, and his patience was bottomless, which Hadrian's never was; nothing unfortunate seems to have happened, and Marcus got away northwards with memories of Alexandria which were a little pleasurable to his pensive and perhaps home-sick heart.

I infer that it was before he reached Athens that he paid his visit to Smyrna. As Hadrian had been drawn there by the repute of Polemon, Marcus was drawn there in part by the fact that two men of some renown were known to be among the residents, the Athenian lecturer Damianus, and the Mysian rhetorician and sophist Aristides, who, four years older than Marcus, had studied, like himself, under Herodes Atticus and Alexandra of Cotiaëum. The name of Damianus would be unknown to-day except for the fact that Marcus thought his lectures sufficiently important to be attended; Aristides thought the same, and was among the audience. The rest of the story may be told by Philostratus:

The emperor, who had already been three days in Smyrna, not yet knowing Aristides personally, requested . . . that the man should not be passed over unnoticed in the imperial levee. . . . The next day [came] Aristides and the emperor addressing him said, "Why have you been so slow in letting me see you?" And Aristides said, "A professional problem, O king, occupied me, and the mind, when so engaged, must not be detached from the prosecution of its enquiry." The emperor, charmed by the man's character, his extreme naïveté and studiousness, said, "When shall I hear you?" And Aristides replied, "Suggest a subject to-day and hear me to-morrow. . . . But grant, O king, that my pupils may also be present at the hearing." "Certainly," said Marcus, "they

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may, for it is free to all." . . . And on Aristides saying, "Permit them, O king, to cheer and applaud as loud as they can," the emperor smiling said, "That depends on yourself."

Did Marcus detect a touch of the dead Fronto in the professional vanity of this other rhetorician? If so he did not resent it, being well accustomed to the pretensions of the petted tribe. We shall hear of Aristides again, his vanity sobered by a great calamity. Meanwhile we picture him and Marcus seated, with some tens or hundreds of other folk, in the lecture-room of the now forgotten Damianus.

In Greece Marcus, like Hadrian, was initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries. So far as we can tell from the *Meditations*, parts of which may have been written in the four years that followed, this initiation did not add much if anything to the philosophic and religious convictions of the emperor. It is unfortunate that we know so little about the famous Mystery of Eleusis. That the initiate was given a scenic representation of the story of Proserpine and her mother, and received suggestions of life beyond the present, is fairly certain, and it is conceivable that Marcus, as he came away, felt himself strengthened in his reverence for the gods, or at least for the names and legends familiar to him through the studies of his youth. The beauty of the Proserpine legend, the vague but comely hope of immortality held out by this and other elements of pagan religion and philosophy may have seemed to him finer and chaster than ever in comparison with the fanaticisms that were swarming in from further east. But the hope of immortality never quite reached with Marcus the status of firm assurance.

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One little touch of Marcian graciousness is associated with this initiation. We remember how years before, Marcus had sought to help Herodes Atticus. That famous man, cantankerous, philanthropic, suspect, and unfortunate, Marcus had hoped—or so he said in a comforting letter—to meet at Athens, there to be initiated by him. But Herodes was dead before he arrived.

Having heavily endowed the chairs in rhetoric and philosophy in the cities he had visited—the four schools of Stoicism, Epicureanism, Platonism, Aristotelianism being treated without partiality, though his own preference was no secret—Marcus found himself in 176 back in the capital, and Dio Cassius tells us that when, addressing the people, “he mentioned among other things that he had been absent many years, they shouted ‘Eight’ and signified this besides with their fingers, of course that they might get so many pieces of gold for a congiarium. The emperor smiled, and himself said ‘Yes, eight,’ and afterwards distributed two hundred drachmas apiece, a larger sum than they had ever had before.” He also celebrated with his son Commodus a rather belated triumph for the victories over the northern tribes, Marcus, it is said, walking or running on foot at the side of his son’s chariot.

The triumph of Marcus, says Pater,

was now a “full” one—*Justus Triumphus*—justified by far more than the due amount of bloodshed in those northern wars, at length, it might seem, happily at an end. Among the captives, awed by the laughter of the crowds at his blowsy upper garment, his trousered legs, and conical wolfskin cap walked our own ancestor, representative of subject

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Germany . . . with plenty of uncouth pathos in his misshapen features, and the pale, servile, yet angry eyes. His children, white-skinned and golden-haired "as angels," trudged beside him. His brothers of the animal world, the ibex, the wild-cat, and the reindeer, stalking and trumpeting grandly found their due place in the procession, and among the spoil set forth on a portable frame that it might be distinctly seen . . . a wattled cottage in all the simplicity of its snug contrivances against the cold . . .

These Romans [thought Marius the Epicurean] were a coarse, vulgar people. . . . And Aurelius himself seemed to have fallen to the level of his reward in a mediocrity no longer golden.

Yet . . . to the multitude he came as a more than magnanimous conqueror. That he had forgiven the innocent wife and children of the dashing and almost successful rebel, Avidius Cassius, now no more, was a recent circumstance still in memory.

There is a grudging tone in Pater's words which is hard to explain; we are almost glad that the pseudo-story of *Marius the Epicurean* comes to an end soon after this description of the return of Marcus from the East.

The capital of the empire had now a year or two in which to appreciate the presence of the saintly and ageing monarch. The affection of the citizens passed increasingly into a reverence that was almost hysterical; Marcus was deified, in their minds, before his death, and Rome clung to him as to no mere emperor before or after, even to his noble and more fortunate predecessor in the purple. There was reason, ample reason for this. In the reign of Antoninus Pius there had been none of the sense of anxiety, almost of doom, that had come to prevail in many hearts since the days of the barbarian irruption and drew men in passionate love to the head of the

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State, so gracious in affairs of peace, so devoted and assiduous in those of war. The barbarians, it is true, seemed likely to be kept more or less at bay, but the efforts of defence threatened to be a constant strain; the plague too, had not yet disappeared; and the Christians were more than ever appearing to earnest pagans in the guise of enemies to the empire, for to be neutrals, indifferent to the extremity and peril from without, was little less than treason.

There was an even deeper cause for anxiety, a more poignant argument in favour of cherishing Marcus while he was yet with them. The question must often have been asked, as it had doubtless been asked by Avidius Cassius, "What will happen when the emperor dies?" Though we may give Commodus the benefit of every doubt, he was yet merely a boy in his teens, and even if he had been the kind of boy that Marcus was at the same age the prospect for the overstrained empire was not rosy. Allegiance to a boy, moreover, was a novelty; Nero was seventeen on his accession, but the recollection was not an encouraging one. And though in the recent triumph Commodus had been associated with his father, as if in an attempt to extract every scrap of hope out of the situation and to awaken in the boy a sense of responsibility, there was even less promise of eminence on his part than Nero had shown. On the other hand there was perhaps no actual evidence, beyond the crudity of his tastes, that he had the heart of a monster or a madman.

It was about this time that certain noteworthy works of art were set up in Rome. One of them, the Triumphal Arch of Marcus Aurelius, was designed to celebrate the recent defeat of the barbarians, and on one of the twelve

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panels we see German captives brought into the presence of the emperor, whose hand is raised in a protective gesture of mercy.\*

About this time, too, was designed the Antonine Column in honour of the late monarch and his wife, the Elder Faustina; its actual erection followed in the reign of Commodus. The sculpture on the base is noteworthy as showing the Miracle of the Thundering Legion in what may be called the official version of the event.† From the beard and the wings of a benign Jupiter Pluvius there pours down a shower of rain which the Roman soldiers catch in their shields while the barbarians are struck prostrate by the thunderbolts of the god. Though it is clear that the legend had a basis of fact, there is no reference whatever to the prayers of the Christians.

To the condition of those misunderstood and difficult people we must now return.

\* See Frontispiece.

† See plates in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, eleventh edition; Vol. XXIII.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE CHRISTIANS ONCE MORE

IF the date commonly assigned to the persecution at Lyons is correct, and the story itself is accepted, Marcus in his last years gave his sanction to that barbarous episode, told in every detail of its horror by Renan in his *Marcus Aurelius*. Both date and story are not beyond doubt,\* but, accepted as they stand, we learn that a community of Gallic Christians at Lyons and Vienne, with Asiatic and Montanist affiliations, underwent through many weeks the most atrocious tortures, and that a reference to Rome during the course of the episode gave sanction in some measure to this procedure. Among the many who suffered, the aged Pothinus and the youthful slave Blandina were eminent, but I agree with Mr. Dove that the blood-curdling story of the tortures of Blandina "utterly defies common-sense and bears every mark of fiction."†

It seems extraordinarily difficult to reach the whole truth about the alleged persecution of the Christians during these years, and in particular about the complicity or otherwise of Marcus Aurelius. On the one hand we have the claim of Tertullian, who lived right through the reign and many years beyond, that though the populace of the empire was always ready to cry "*Christianos ad leonem!* if the Tiber floods the city or the Nile refuses to rise or the sky withholds its rain or disasters occur—earthquake or famine or pestilence"—yet it

\* See note above, p. 142, as to the date.

† *Life*, p. 229.

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was the bad emperors, not the good, who persecuted; and we have Christian documents which, though fabricated, bear witness to a tradition of friendliness or respect felt by the Christians for Marcus. The legend of the Thundering Legion is one among several of these; here we have the Christian soldiers represented as praying for the safety of the emperor and empire, and though the pagan tradition says nothing of this, and, what is still more important, the Antonine Column with its Jupiter Pluvius, etc., says nothing, the fact that there was a Christian version of the story indicates at least an attitude of respect towards Marcus. There is also a "*Letter of the Emperor Marcus to the Senate in which he testifies that the Christians were the cause of the victory of the Romans.*" He is here reputed to have said, with regard to his time of peril on the Vistula:

I took refuge in prayer to the gods of our fathers. But being disregarded by them, . . . I called upon those whom we name Christians—and by enquiry I found out the greatness of their numbers—going so far as to inveigh against them, which I ought not to have done, for I afterwards learnt their power. They then [bethought them of] no equipment of missiles or arms or trumpets, since this is hateful to them by reason of the God that they bear in their conscience. It is likely, then, that they whom we suppose to be godless have a self-acting God entrenched in their conscience. For, casting themselves on the ground they prayed, not for me alone, but also for the whole army. . . . Straightway there came water from heaven, . . . but upon the enemies of Rome fiery hail. . . . From this moment, therefore, let us allow such persons to be Christians, lest by praying they obtain such weapons against us.

Marcus is supposed to have ordered that in the future



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people should be burnt alive who made accusation against a Christian, unless the accusation went beyond the fact of Christianity and involved real crimes.

It is certain that Marcus never wrote this letter, but it is a definite indication of a Christian tradition in favour of him.

There is another letter in which Marcus is supposed to address Euxenianus Publio (in charge of the rebuilding of Smyrna after the earthquake) and to ask that the Bishop of Hierapolis, Abercius, "a man of such sanctity among the Christians as both to cure those who are possessed by demons and easily heal all other diseases," should be sent to Marcus "with all reverence and honour." The letter is an obvious forgery (we know Marcus's views on exorcism from I, 6 of the *Meditations*), but it duplicates a tradition that when Marcus was away on the frontier Abercius cured the princess Lucilla, sixteen years old at the time, by casting out a demon, and received as a reward certain benefits for his city, a city which Marcus might very well have wished to benefit as the birth-place of Epictetus. Now the casting out of any demons that possessed Lucilla was very desirable inasmuch as she was to become the wife of Lucius Verus; but if there is any grain of truth in the story we cannot now recover it. Only—it once again testifies that the Christians had a friendly or at least a not hostile feeling towards Marcus, or they would not invent, or embroider, such stories.

There is yet another document pointing to the same conclusion. Marcus is addressing a letter to the Common Assembly of Asia on the question of the punishment of Christians. The emperor expresses the opinion that the

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gods were by far the best punishers: it was their concern to see that anyone who despised them received his due; for magistrates to harass the Christians and call them "atheists" would only harden them in their opinions. With regard to the recent earthquakes the Christians seemed, he thought, more devout towards their gods than the pagans towards their various divinities. In short, the tolerant policy of the emperor's deified father should be pursued; Christianity should not be regarded as a crime in itself, and accusers of Christians should be punished.

It seems probable that this last document contains parts of a genuine edict composed in the spirit of the previous instructions or edicts of Trajan, Hadrian, and Antoninus Pius. It may have been issued when Marcus was junior emperor, or in the year of his accession, or later; the second hypothesis fits the facts best. As it comes down to us through Christian sources it is one further piece of evidence of the favourable way in which the Christians looked back upon Marcus. It seems almost incredible that an emperor to whom such edicts and letters could be attributed by the Christians was an intentional persecutor of them.

And yet the evidence on the other side is pretty definite. It comes, as I said in a previous chapter, partly from Marcus himself. We saw that though in the *Meditations* he expressed something like admiration for the courage of certain fanatics (he never mentions Christians by name, the phrase "like the Christians" in XI, 3, being ungrammatical and almost certainly interpolated), the fact that they showed this courage when being "torn" or "cut limb from limb," points definitely

to certain persecuting episodes of the Lyons kind, and episodes that were not extraordinarily infrequent.

External evidence points to the same result, even if some dates may have been displaced. The last years of the reign of Marcus were years of continuing anxiety, and the attitude of the state towards the Christians was evidently a burning question with all patriotic Romans as well as with the Christians themselves. The Christians were now so numerous and bold that to them, as also to their critics, the idea of Christianity ultimately becoming the state religion was beginning to appear possible. And so we get "apologies" or defences of Christianity composed for the perusal of the emperor himself, and also a most interesting document from the other side.

The first of these "apologies" dates from the preceding reign, though there was then little or no persecution to call for it. About the year 139 Justin "Martyr" (he had not then acquired the title) wrote an address to Antoninus Pius and the two young princes (Marcus he significantly calls "Verissimus the Philosopher"), defending the Christians against the charges of atheism and hostility to the State, emphasizing the moral influence of the sect and explaining pagan doctrines as the work of demons. He also pointed out the inconvenience of everlasting punishment for rulers who persecuted the true religion. In 152, when certain Christians had suffered at the hands of Lollius Urbicus, Justin reopened the argument, and in 163, or a little later, he was himself put to death by Rusticus, whom we have met as the Stoic tutor of Marcus.

Later in the reign of Marcus other "apologies" followed

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A certain bishop, Melito of Sardis, was the author of one of these and in the course of it a reference occurs to certain "new edicts" by which "pious men" in Asia were being persecuted and hunted. "If all this is executed by thine order, it is well; for a just prince cannot order any unjust thing"; but would the emperor be pleased to look into the matter himself and see whether what is being done is justly done? Christianity, he goes on, arose at the same time as the empire of Augustus and had been always protected by the good emperors, including Antoninus Pius; surely Marcus, "with a still more elevated degree of philanthropy and philosophy," will not refuse justice to the Christians!

A similar appeal came from a certain Athenagoras. Perfectly loyal Christians were being deprived of life, property, and character (this last by accusations of cannibalism and incest, the "kiss of peace" being misunderstood and actually quite innocent) and he entreats the emperors, Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, "whom nature and education have made so excellent, so moderate, so humane," to do justice; if they will, the Christians will pray for the prosperity and extension of the empire and the succession of the son to the throne of his father.

Almost at the moment of these appeals, the pagan writer Celsus, friend of Lucian of Samosata, was making a very different appeal to the Christians themselves. Celsus had studied with unusual care the Jewish and Christian scriptures, and his critical arguments against both religions have a very modern sound; but the matter which was most at his heart was the immediate peril to the empire. The barbarians were beating against the frontier; gladiators and slaves had been enrolled for

want of other defenders; the whole structure of civilization was in the gravest danger. If the empire perished Christianity would perish too. "Help the emperor with all your force; share with him in the defence of right; cease to decline the duties of civil life and military service; take your part in the public functions if it be necessary for the safety of the laws and the cause of piety."

If we combine the testimonies of Justin, Melito, Athenagoras, and Celsus the main facts clearly emerge. There was some desertion of their civic and military duties on the part of the Christians (though there were also professions and deeds of loyalty) and there was punishment of the Christians by the State, which punishment can be called "persecution" by anyone who prefers the word. The position of the Christians was much the same as that of the Catholics under Queen Elizabeth after (not before) 1570. To this hour people dispute whether the Catholics were "persecuted" when they were sent to the gallows as traitors. The Queen had been excommunicated by the Pope and her subjects released from their obedience; by implication every Catholic was a "traitor," and some of them, by forming plots for the assassination of the Queen, became traitors in reality. Though the Christians in the time of Marcus were quite guiltless of plots against the government they grew increasingly hostile to military service and to mixing in any civic capacity with the pagans; in that sense they were, if not traitors at least deserters, frigid and unsympathetic members of a State within the State. Now, inasmuch as the perils and needs of the State were desperate, there was a growth in many quarters of popular fury against these deserting and segregating Christians,

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a feeling which reached in certain cases to the magistrates. It was industriously fanned by slander.

The dilemma of Marcus as I have pointed out, can be detected in the *Meditations*. Of the five passages bearing on the Christians four seem to praise, in an anonymous way, their independence and courage, and three make reference to the cruel circumstances of their despatch. Their faithfulness unto death is the only virtue Marcus records in their favour, but in the eyes of a Stoic it was a great one. On the other side of the account were (1) the theatrical fashion in which they chose to die, (2) their belief "in incantations and in the exorcizing of demons," (3) the stock charges against them of being "atheists" and "doing their deeds behind closed doors," and (4) the great political offence of "failing their country in its need." It is the last offence which can alone justify in modern eyes the persecution of the Christians in the reigns of Marcus and of some of his successors; the other charges were either false or should have been readily pardonable.

Some Christians, as we have seen, many of them perhaps, did not decline to serve the State, and if the State's need had not been so desperate I imagine that Marcus would have vetoed such punishment—or "persecution"—as took place. But the needs were indeed desperate, especially in the matter of manpower, and when the Christians added to their eccentric ways a strong tendency to be conscientious objectors and pacifists on principle, mob rule and the local magistracy could no longer be held in check by the merciful inclinations of the chief magistrate. Soon after his return from the East we find him directing the magistrates to be watchful of all

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religious extravagances, especially such, we infer, as involved threats of eternal torment. "If anyone shall do anything whereby the weak minds of any may be terrified by superstitious fear, the Divine Marcus commanded that such men should be exiled to an island." That there were many extravagances among both Christians and pagans I shall show in the next chapter.

## PARTIES AND MOVEMENTS

IT is difficult to avoid doing injustice to one or other or all of the parties that existed in the Roman world in the time of Marcus Aurelius. Impressed by the splendid eulogies passed by him on his relatives and friends at the opening of the *Meditations*, as well as by the moral sublimity of his character, the civic sympathies of modern readers may be at first strongly drawn to the pagan side. This was, moreover, fated to be the losing side, albeit it was the side of such organized civilization as there was. Barbarians on the north were seeking to destroy an empire which was at least bringing to reality for the Mediterranean World the dream of universal peace and, in one respect, was increasingly representing the Spirit of Man at its best, namely, the gradual humanization of the law. Yet the defence of this empire was falling into the hands of the pagans, and, Thundering Legion or no Thundering Legion, the Christians were somewhat indifferent to the task and refused to pull their weight in the ranks of the depleted army. Indeed, by deliberately seeking martyrdom, as many of them did, they not only shirked their civic duties but created friction, ill-feeling, and schism, similar to that caused in later centuries by "passive resisters"; and martyrdom seemed a waste of human life at a time when, owing to the plague, life was more than usually precious. Should not our sympathies go out almost exclusively to Marcus and the pagans?



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That is not an untrue presentation of the case, but it is not a complete presentation.

For one thing, paganism was not entirely a seemly civic worship of vague and harmless gods, with a moral stiffening derived from Stoicism and an innocent, mystic, and inspiring thrill capturable at Eleusis. The vast majority of the pagans were as crudely superstitious and unreasonable as, in the eyes of the philosophers, the Christians themselves. Dio Cassius and Capitolinus record marvels quite freely, especially in the matter of portents and omens. An illustration alike of the finer side of paganism and of the follies to which paganism could descend is presented in connection with a question which became particularly important in the plague-ridden reign of Marcus.

Apollo, Aesculapius his son, and Hygeia the daughter (or possibly wife) of Aesculapius, were the recognized deities of Health. It was through some dishonour done to Apollo during the campaign of Avidius Cassius, that the plague, men said, had come to Rome;

Pent up in a golden coffer consecrated to the god, it had escaped in the sacrilegious plundering of his temple at Seleuceia by the soldiers after a traitorous surprise of that town and a cruel massacre.

But the family Trinity aforesaid could also, when properly treated, be beneficent, especially in the person of the Son. As Pater says in *Marius the Epicurean*:

The religion of Aesculapius . . . reached under the Antonines the height of its popularity . . . *Salus*, salvation, for the Romans, had come to mean bodily sanity. The religion of the god of bodily health, *Salvator*, as they called

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him, absolutely had a chance just then of becoming the one religion. The apparatus of the medical art, the salutary mineral or herb, diet or abstinence, and all the varieties of the bath, come to have a kind of sacramental character, . . . the body becoming truly . . . a quiet handmaid of the soul. . . . The priesthood or "family" of Aesculapius . . . was a vast college . . . and the temples of the god, rich in accumulated thank offerings, . . . were really also a kind of hospital for the sick, administered in a full conviction of the religiousness, the refined and sacred happiness, of a life spent in the relieving of pain. . . . Through dreams . . . inspired by Aesculapius himself, information as to the cause and cure of a malady was supposed to come to the sufferer, . . . and the really scientific Galen has recorded how beneficently they had intervened in his own case. . . . In the temple gardens of Aesculapius could be seen the Houses of Birth and Death erected for reception respectively of women about to become mothers and of persons about to die. . . . There was a spring of which it was said, "Being come unto this place the son of God [Aesculapius] loved it exceedingly, and he had given mankind the well."

There was something surely of beauty in the Prayer for Health which a sufferer in one of the hospitals would address to the Inspired Dreams sent by the god:

*O ye children of Apollo! who in time past have stilled the waves of sorrow for many people, . . . accept this prayer. . . . Preserve me from sickness, and endue my body with such a measure of health as may suffice it for the obeying of the spirit, that I may pass my days unhindered and in quietness.*

To all this Marcus could not be indifferent. We catch glimpses, even in the *Meditations*, of this Hygeia or Aesculapius worship; of the prescription, in the god's name, of riding exercise, of walking barefoot, and of cold baths (V, 8); and Aristides tried an icy bath on the

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same authority. Even more efficacious than icy baths were, however, sundry miracles of healing narrated by the same writer. The temples of Aesculapius, we must remember, were not only hospitals and sanatoria but shrines where miracles were worked and oracles uttered. No one doubted the fact of these things, though the Christians, a little embarrassed, attributed them to the ubiquitous demons.

But though the cult of Aesculapius was widespread, the personality of the god had perhaps grown a little dim since the days when Zeus, in jealousy of his attainments, had killed him and then by special request translated him to the skies. It was very desirable that Aesculapius should come again to earth and recommence in person his beneficent activities of healing the sick and raising the dead, adding to them, as far as possible, the functions of private and public advisor and fortune-teller. A regular royal god located on the earth was obviously better than one in the skies. And now rumours grew that there was an actual probability of the friendliest of the gods being born again.

On the southern shore of the Black Sea there stands west of Sinope the town formerly called Abonoteichus, but to-day Ineboli, after Ionapolis, the new name given it by Marcus Aurelius in consequence of the events about to be chronicled. Could we carry ourselves back to that town as it was in the time of the emperor and his predecessor we should hear and see strange doings. For lo! in the foundations of a temple of Aesculapius then being built there was found an egg containing a small live snake. As everybody knew, snakes were sacred to the god, and this fact, added to prophetic rumours of

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a coming reincarnation, now fortified by the open assurances of a certain local Alexander, convinced the people of Abonoteichus that Aesculapius had come again to earth.

This impostor of Abonoteichus had the double advantage of a medical training and of possessing in high degree the gifts commonly attributed to charlatans. Alexander, said Lucian his great enemy, was a handsome man with a touch of divinity about him. "His eyes were piercing, and suggested inspiration, his voice at once sweet and sonorous. . . . In understanding, resource, acuteness, he was far above other men." To prevent any confusion between the original and the second Epiphany, Alexander called the god not Aesculapius but Glycon, and before long Glycon in the form of a large snake with a human head (otherwise described, however, more unkindly, as a head made of canvas and equipped with speaking tubes) was giving medical and other advice to all comers. His fame was already considerable before the death of Antoninus Pius, for we have seen that when that event precipitated the Parthians into their war with Rome, the Roman governor thought well to consult not the Roman augurs, whose reputation was somewhat faded, but the oracle of Glycon. Oracles are generally optimistic even if a little ambiguous (spiritualists seem rarely to get depressing messages), but in this case the promised victory in the field took the unhappy form of a defeat. However, a few failures made as little difference in the second as they make in the twentieth century; money rolled in, and the fame of Abonoteichus and its prophet and god spread to Rome and beyond.

It is true there were critics. The Christians had no

intention of allowing their own brand of beneficent activity, with its "incantations and exorcizing of demons," to be ousted by any Glycon. The Epicureans, the sceptics of antiquity, proclaimed that the whole thing was an imposture, and Lucian nearly accomplished the unique achievement of being an Epicurean martyr by pursuing at the very headquarters of Alexander the unfriendly investigations from which the present details are derived.\* In point of fact, investigations into the "occult" were as little desired in those days as in ours; Lucian might expose and laugh at the follies of men, and Christians protest that if people wanted to be healed they should come to the right place where it could certainly happen (*deo volente*); the career of Alexander of Abonoteichus continued to be a splendid success, though at the time at which we have arrived the prophet was already past his best and might have been benefited by a little invigoration or rejuvenation himself, if Glycon had only thought of it.

Feeble or not, he seems to have been the only person since legendary times who ever succeeded in *marrying a real goddess*. As the Moon still retained a reputation for chastity (in spite of that Endymion affair) and none but an unblemished as well as a divine bride was suitable for an authentic prophet of Glycon, Alexander *married the Moon* (otherwise Luna or, better, Selene), and later made suitable arrangements for disposing of the offspring of the marriage. One elderly Roman of consular rank, his chief supporter in official circles, was given the

\* The battle-royal between Lucian of Samosata and Alexander of Abonoteichus is told briefly in *The Street of the Sandalmakers*, Chapter XV, together with other details of the oracular business. The fundamental document is Lucian's *Alexander the Oracle-monger*.

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privilege, through the advisory department of the oracle, of marrying the girlish Nokomis of whom Alexander claimed the paternity. He doubtless held that as the supply of goddesses was scanty, demi-goddesses were not to be despised. Later on Glycon, too, entered into connubial relations, asceticism not being a feature of the cult.

Seeing that everybody could not travel to the Black Sea for advice and cure, branches of the Mother Church were established elsewhere, those disagreeable people the Christians and the Epicureans being carefully excluded. "Proclamation was made: 'If there be any atheist or Christian or Epicurean here, spying upon our rites, let him depart in haste: and let all such as have faith in the god be initiated and all blessing attend them.'" Then the litany proceeded with "Christians, avaunt!" and "Epicureans, avaunt!" As in spiritualist meetings at the present day the presence of unbelievers had an adverse effect on the manifestations.

The great pestilence and the great war both gave opportunities to Alexander. As a protection against the plague, people inscribed over their doors a formula provided and warranted by the prophet; it may be regarded as an anticipation of Dr. Saleeby's *Sunlight League*, for it ran:

*Phoebus the unshorn dispels the mist of sickness.*

But the god, as we have already seen, did not confine his benefactions to one department: he occasionally invaded those of Athena, Mars, Bellona, or the increasingly popular Mithras. Alexander had advised on the Parthian War and had dexterously accounted for the disaster that followed, and about the year 171 an

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inquiry was sent to the oracle, with the consent of Marcus Aurelius, concerning the state of warlike affairs on the Danube. The god replied that if two Live Lions were cast into that stream victory would be assured. The lions were accordingly saved from the amphitheatre, where their value had already been reduced through the humanitarian scruples of the emperor, to perish on the Danube by the clubs of the barbarians, and a defeat by (not of) the enemy promptly followed.

The failure was as readily explained by Alexander as the other defeat ten years before, and there is some reason to believe that he died in his bed at an advanced age, though with less physical buoyancy than should appertain, if the gods were logical, as well as just, to their prophets.

The fact that so good and enlightened a man as Marcus Aurelius was persuaded into consulting on military affairs such a man as Alexander the Paphlagonian, or at any rate the oracle at which the prophet presided, is eloquent in two ways. It emphasizes the desperation in the war; all the gods had to be rallied to the cause of the empire. Obviously, too, when an Incarnate God was available for consultation it was madness to leave him out. Jupiter Pluvius was to send rain in 174, Aesculapius (otherwise Glycon) was naturally asked to send information in 171. When Olympian deities, at any rate, were concerned, Marcus had no choice but to be tolerant and even reverent. It is true he had lamented to Fronto, years before, that reliability was not a strong point of divine oracles, possibly owing to the imperfections of language. Still, oracles were recognized institutions, Aesculapius was a recognized deity, and Marcus was too good a Roman to cast gratuitous doubt upon

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Alexander's new form of worship of that useful and benignant god in the hour of the empire's peril. Alas! the sequel justified his youthful fears, but the episode remains interesting as indicative of the spiritual condition of the world over which Marcus ruled. It was seething with movements and superstitions, with hopes and despairs, and in these, we must remember, the Christians had their share.

Thus it was from among them and in the same region as that of Alexander of Abonoteichus, though farther south, that there arose the influential movement headed by Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla. We have seen that Marcus, though admiring the obedience to conscience that Christians manifested even unto death, objected to the theatrical attitude which they seemed to adopt when making the final sacrifice. Men should face death not in a spirit of defiance or triumph but with quiet dignity.

Now there is considerable ground for believing that the self-advertising Christians to whom he is referring were mainly Montanists.

One can hardly help sympathizing in some measure with the Montanists. Resembling in certain ways the modern Quakers and Salvationists, they held that the Gifts of the Spirit which, a century or more earlier, distinguished, or were said to have distinguished, the Christians, should not have died out, or should not now be allowed to die out. Inspiration in the Church was giving place to organization: Christianity was changing from a thing of light and fire into a thing of order and officialism: into an *institution*. Who was there that "spoke with tongues" in those degenerate days? Who was there



that received direct illumination from God? In short, what was the matter with the Church?

Needless to say, the Montanists, thus harking back a whole century, were Millenarians like the early Christians they sought to imitate. The Second Coming of Christ, they believed, was very near. That being so, marriages and, above all, second marriages were hardly decent—St. Paul's view also—while, on the contrary, martyrdom was a very desirable experience. A "common or garden" Christian who had ceased to think of Christ coming back into the world next year, might form human ties, and though perhaps willing to be a martyr if this were necessary would not eagerly ask to be one. But the Montanists had a *lust* for martyrdom, and there is little doubt that Marcus had them much in his mind when he condemned what seemed to him the theatrical attitude of the Christians towards violent death.

The most remarkable man of the Montanist school was Tertullian. He was born a little time before the accession of Marcus to the full imperatorship, and before the emperor's death he was already known for his forensic ability. Then he became a Christian, and, as he could never do anything by halves, he became a fiery defender of the faith against the Gnostics and Heretics until, coming under Montanist influence during the reign of Septimius Severus, he broke with the Church on the ground of its increasing laxity, worldliness, and unspirituality. There is some reason to believe that, if Tertullian had had the power, he would have burnt Calixtus, Bishop of Rome, and enjoyed the spectacle; and equal reason to believe that Calixtus, given the same condition, would have burnt Tertullian, who, on his

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part, would certainly have enjoyed the experience. But though Tertullian wrote a book in defence of martyrdom he, nevertheless, had the bad luck to die in bed.

Not so (we must get back to the reign of Marcus) Peregrinus the Cynic, a man probably much disliked by the emperor who, as a matter of principle, tried to dislike no one.

What a world it was in which such opposite types as the successful charlatan and the enthusiastic martyr could both flourish; in which, too, the pagan critic, Celsus (friend of Lucian), could follow up his criticisms of Christians with an appeal to them to be patriotic!

I have told, in fact, only a fragment of the story. Gods were plentiful, new gods and old. Peregrinus obtained what he wished, and the shores of the Propontis saw his worship established not far from that of Glycon, heard his oracles, and, like Lourdes to-day, recorded many people cured of their diseases by his power. The divine serpent of Abonoteichus, with another divine serpent to wife, retained his place, and the worship established by the super-impostor flourished at least as late as the recovery of the empire after the anarchy. Not to be outdone by any Glycon or Aesculapius, another Salvator, Hercules himself, came to earth again and walked the woods of Bœotia and the slopes of Parnassus in the form of a giant, giving oracles and receiving worship. His mortal name was Sostratus; Lucian met him and later described his acts of benevolence, including his extermination of robbers; a really useful god, almost equal to his former incarnation. The emperor Commodus, a big man, was also to fancy himself as Hercules, and why not thus anticipate things, if emperors, sooner or

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later, automatically became gods? The Sun, too, otherwise Mithras, was growing in popularity, and rapidly becoming the favourite god of the legionaries, as Kipling reminds us:

Mithras, God of the Morning, our trumpets waken the wall;  
Rome is above the nations, but thou art over all.

And as sex partiality in these theological matters was undesirable, Egypt provided Rome not only with a god Serapis, who drew crowds of worshippers, but with a goddess Isis and her babe Horus, both popular among women.\* Nay, it is said that the emperor Marcus himself felt friendly towards the goddess, albeit her worship had been prohibited by Augustus and a temple to her destroyed during the reign of Tiberius; certainly her ritual seemed comparatively blameless and was not devoid of beauty; it was mainly the Isis tradition that, two centuries later, transformed the mother of Jesus, whose relations with her Son and His with her, if we are to judge from His recorded utterances, were decidedly strained, into the gracious and exalted personality called the Virgin Mary.

And if Keats is right, it was about this time that Psyche (the Soul),

. . . latest born and loveliest vision far  
Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy,

was first embodied as a goddess; certainly it was at this time that the story of Cupid's love of her was first told in *The Golden Ass*. Apuleius, like Lucian, was of almost

\* It was an Egyptian priest, according to one account, who saved the Thundering Legion situation, and in the pages of *The Street of the Sandalmakers* the Egyptian priesthood brings trouble on the Christians.

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exactly the same age as Marcus, and it is in his pages that Psyche appears with her too, too great inquisitiveness about divine things. And whether or not temples were actually raised to her and virgin choirs made delicious moan in her honour, the emperor certainly built in his own soul a temple to the SOUL, and as he thought of mankind in its folly and weakness and sin and striving, kept the casement open day and night,

To let the warm love in.

In one sense, indeed, this, the Soul of Man in strange kinship and stranger wedlock with the Soul of the Universe, was the favourite deity of Marcus and might have become his Only God except that, for reasons of state, something of the old Roman tradition had to be preserved. Lucian's jests at the expense of the faded hierarchy must have pleased Marcus as little as the same writer's risky exposure of Alexander of Abonoteichus, if Marcus lived long enough to read of it. It were well for men to lift up their eyes to the hills, for, if majestic Olympus and its pantheon were too readily forgotten, maybe some petty green hill farther away would take its unsatisfactory place in men's worship.

The emperor had to be "at once the most zealous of philosophers and the most devout of polytheists"; philosophy itself could not resist the pressure from without, and became more and more theological; a doctrine of emanations, hinted at in the pages of Marcus, increased in popularity and was an aid rather than an hindrance to superstition. And side by side with the cult of the Galilean, which was becoming more and more the cult of a god, there was growing up the respectable cult of Marcus

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himself. "From Augustus downwards," Pater says, "a vague divinity had seemed to surround the Caesars even in this life; and the peculiar character of Aurelius, at once a ceremonious polytheist . . . and a philosopher whose mystic speculations encircled him with a sort of saintly halo, had restored to his person, without his intending it, something of that divine prerogative or prestige. Though he would never allow the immediate dedication of altars to himself, yet the image of his *genius*—his spirituality or celestial counterpart—was placed among those of the deified princes of the past; and his family, including Faustina and the young Commodus, was spoken of as the 'holy' or 'divine' house." It was thus clear that, unless rival divinities should prove too thrilling to allow serious competition on the part of his pensive shade, Marcus had a chance, as he very well knew (IV, 1), of being worshipped as a god. Had not the vastly cruder Vespasian said, when dying, "*Vae! puto deus fio?*"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### COMMODUS

PREVIOUS to the accession of Marcus to the full authority of the imperial office, five daughters and one son had been born, of whom three daughters, it seems, were surviving. In the year of his accession, as we have seen, twin boys were born, Commodus and Antoninus, to be followed a year or two later by another boy, Annius Verus, and still later by a daughter. The younger twin, Antoninus, died after four years of life, and Annius Verus a few years afterwards, leaving Commodus as the only surviving prince.

Pater gives us the picture of the death of Annius Verus which took place about the time when another Verus, the co-emperor, also took leave of the world; and the pathetic episode may serve as an introduction to the theme of Commodus. The dying child is some six or seven years old:

Annian Verus for his part had forgotten all his toys, lying all day across the knees of his mother, as a mere child's earache grew rapidly to alarming sickness with great and manifest agony, only suspended a little, from time to time, when from very weariness he passed into a few moments of unconsciousness. The country surgeon called in, had removed the imposthume with a knife. There had been a great effort to bear this operation. . . . At length, amid a company of pupils pressing in with him, as the custom was, to watch the proceedings in the sick room, the eminent Galen had arrived, only to pronounce the thing done visibly useless, the patient falling now into longer periods of delirium. [The

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visitor was forced] into the privacy of a grief, the desolate face of which went deep into his memory, as he saw the emperor carry the child away—quite conscious at last, but with a touching expression upon it of weakness and defeat—pressed close to his bosom, as if he yearned just then for one thing only, to be united, to be absolutely one with it, in its obscure distress.

The emperor demanded a senatorial decree for the erection of images in memory of the dead prince; that a golden one should be carried, together with the other images, in the great procession of the Circus, and the addition of the child's name to the Hymn of the Salian Priests: and so, stifling private grief, without further delay set forth for the war.

Perhaps it was the keen memory of this episode that caused Marcus in writing the *Meditations* to use the illustration of "physicians with their lancets and instruments ready" (III, 13). It were well for the wise man to have his axioms or principles as ready to hand as the physician his instruments.

We leap over the years of the main German campaign, and the revolt of Avidius, and the travels in the East. With the increasing age of Marcus the question of the succession became an urgent one for the empire and, but for his belief in providence, would have become a movingly personal one for Marcus, who may, perhaps, have often asked himself why, by some strange dispensation, the young Antoninus and the young Annius Verus had died and Commodus alone had survived.

We saw that a certain Christian, Athenagoras by name, appealed towards the end of the reign on behalf of his fellow religionists to the two emperors Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and Marcus Aurelius Commodus. The double address was no error on the part of Athenagoras.

The coins of the period tell the story of the rapid promotion of Commodus. Those of 176 speak not only of *Fortuna Redux* (the happy return of the emperor Marcus) but of *Adventus Caesaris* (the coming of the Caesar, that is, of Commodus, who had been the companion of his father in the East). Later in the year the two triumphed for the victories on the Danube, and Commodus received the imperatorship; and the coins of 177 show him in possession of the full Tribunician Power. There was now nothing more to receive. Once Marcus was dead, Commodus would be Lord of the Roman World, with every important office in his hands and with nothing to restrain him but a few senatorial traditions and perhaps the salutary memory of historic assassinations, Nero, Domitian, and the rest.

Faustina, we are told by Capitolinus, had dreamt, in 161, that she gave birth to serpents, one of which was fiercer than the other. More authentic is the story which Fronto himself tells of his visit to the royal nursery,\* and of his sight of the small boy, Commodus, playing with his twin brother and already bearing a close facial resemblance to his father. As he passed into puberty and adolescence the prince showed signs of disappointing the expectations that were entertained, but there is no evidence that he committed any actual deeds of such monstrosity as to exclude the possibility of his becoming, with experience, a tolerable ruler. Dio Cassius, who from the year of the accession of Commodus to the throne knew him well, declared that he "was not naturally wicked but, on the contrary, as guileless as any man that ever lived." This amiable weakness was, indeed, to have its

\* Above pp. 124-5.



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few good as well as its many bad consequences, and we are told that, when he became emperor, Commodus, under the influence of his mistress, Marcia, who was half Christian, did not persecute that sect.

But years before the death of Marcus it had become evident that Commodus would never be a spiritual copy of his father: the slanders and libels of later years accordingly declared that he was no son of Marcus at all; and that Faustina, in fact, had loved a gladiator; the license of the stage was busy with such insinuations even during the life of Marcus. There is no reliable evidence to support the monstrous charge; the busts, to say nothing of the testimony of Fronto already recorded, bear witness to the physical likeness of Commodus to Marcus, though slander, not to be outdone, attributed this to "a shameful magic in which the blood of the murdered gladiator, his true father, had been an ingredient."\* Marcus in his *Meditations* refers, on the other hand, to the "docility, affection, and unaffectedness" of his wife (I, 17), and such facts as are available are to the credit of Faustina. We have seen her nursing the young Annius Verus, in the narrative of Pater, she was with Marcus for a time during the wars with the barbarians, she was called the "Mother of the Camp," only one of her surviving four daughters appears in a doubtful light, and Marcus honoured her memory by a charitable foundation and an altar dedicated to married life—a dedication presumably not intended as a joke.

The contemporary slanders probably represented the craving of the stage for pungent gossip at the expense

\* *Marius the Epicurean*

of the great, and the later libels embodied that cheap kind of wisdom which comes after the event: the comedian loves his joke at the expense of authority, and legend loves to give a heavenly birth to good men and a base birth to bad. Commodus promised to be so unsatisfactory an emperor, and during the twelve years of his rule so realized the promise that, in the sharp contrast with the virtues of Marcus, some men refused to believe that he could have been the son of such a father. But until the mysteries of heredity, variation, and education have been cleared up there is no reason to libel the most beautiful\* woman of the Antonine period, the mother of ten or eleven children, and the holder to the end of her husband's affection. There is talk in Capitolinus of a proposed divorce, but Capitolinus was a century away.

What was, then, the matter with Commodus? The easiest and perhaps commonest answer is an echo of the words of Dio Cassius; that he was a weak young man who, when raised to a giddy height where there was no one to hold him in check, succumbed to the innumerable temptations that assailed him, including the temptation, in default of other possible achievements, of seeking popularity with the common crowd in ways that appealed to them. Another answer, popular for some centuries and still more so to-day, is that he had been so bored by the moral instructions and exhortations of Marcus and the tutorial philosophers that, in mere reaction and contrariance, he went the opposite way. The former explanation accounts for much that happened after the death of

\* *The Street of the Sandalmakers* differs on this point of beauty from Pater and the other authorities. Faustina was "coarse with hard face . . ." Marcus, too, had a "satyr face." Our novelist is hard to please.

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Marcus, though we must do Commodus the justice of remembering that decency was preserved for some time after his accession and that it was a threat upon his life that seems to have let loose his baser nature. In our days, too, of sapience on the subject of "inferiority complexes," we cannot overlook the fact that Commodus was, in a sense, overshadowed by the universally admitted perfections of Marcus; what could a weak young man do but seek to show that, if tenth-rate as a philosopher, he could at least put up a good physical case, and that, if despised by the straitlaced and the highbrow, there were some people, gladiators and the like, who were gratified by his presence and patronage? Lucius Verus, a few years before, had dearly craved, we remember, for distinction in the field. As to the boring ways of his father and of instructors we have no evidence except a hint in the *Meditations* (X, 2); the charm and humility of Marcus would hardly have allowed him to bore anyone of ordinary intelligence, but the professors and philosophers of the court were doubtless unacquainted with the educational devices suggested in modern manuals of teaching and so notoriously successful.

The fundamental trouble was, I fear, that Commodus had a crude or coarse strain, perhaps a mad strain, in his blood. Where it came from, the little we know of heredity does not explain; we have seen how it puzzled contemporaries and led to the grossest suggestions; probably, indeed, to the creation of a myth. Without the admission of a coarse strain, the other explanations do not go far enough. The enormous momentum, so to speak, of the Antonine tradition would, perhaps, have carried a merely weak young man along a road of public decency,

even if in private he showed some of the less respectable aspects of certain emperors. There was probably something wrong with Commodus beyond weakness, something more, too, than the force of normal passion, or the fear of assassination, or the insurgence of an inferiority complex. Something went wrong, maybe, when nature was at work on him; perhaps the fact that he was a twin and was the son of two cousins has a bearing; but, having played with these speculations, we must merely confess our ignorance and regard him as a biological or psychological eccentricity.

Nature, by a cruel sport, had given as a son to the best of men a sort of stupid athlete, only skilful at exercises of the body, a superb boy butcher . . . His little mind inspired him with a hatred of the intellectual society which surrounded his father. He fell into the hands of blackguards of the lowest kinds, who made of him one of the most odious monsters that have ever been seen. Marcus saw better than anyone the impossibility of drawing anything out of this mean being, and nevertheless he neglected nothing to educate him well. The best philosophers lectured before the youth. He listened (something in the way a young lion would have done) while they taught, and allowed them to say on, yawning and showing long teeth to his masters.

Renan's picturesque account may pass, but he, like the historians, had the advantage Marcus did not possess of knowing the later career of Commodus.

In default of an explanation in terms of the depravity of Faustina we will certainly not turn to one in terms of the imbecility of Marcus. The belief that a saintly man must necessarily be weak in mind, a poor judge of character and circumstances, has been all too prevalent in the case of Marcus Aurelius, and he is supposed to have

been as blind to the incipient vices of his son as to the notorious frailties of his wife and the patent treasons of Avidius Cassius. He was probably not blind at all, and the later books of the *Meditations*, though free from any mention of the name of Commodus, speak significantly of certain people who were looking forward joyously to the death of the writer.

We may hold, it is true, with Matthew Arnold, that the imagination of an adolescent youth is not gripped by the example of the subtler and less exuberant virtues; that with the virtues of Marcus there should have gone "the ardour which removes mountains," and that this might have won the heart even of Commodus. We may even hold that if Marcus had once or twice burst into fury and shown the astonished boy another side of his character, history might have another tale to tell of the Roman Empire. It is just possible. But, as Myers says, "there is reason to fear that Marcus loved his enemies too well: that he was too much given to blessing those that cursed him"; and to his son, of all people, he was perhaps most consistently patient. Patience is a virtue that only maturity can fully appreciate.

"But if," it may be said, "Marcus was conscious of the grave defects of Commodus, did he not commit a blunder of the worst type—a blunder against his own city of God, the community of Mankind—when he raised the youth step by step to a seat by his side, and finally made him co-emperor? Did he not show here a real failure in moral courage?"

The answer on this point is more conclusive than on the other. *There was no possible way of safe retreat.* The birth of a prince was so rare, so unique an event, that

almost from the first Commodus had been recognized, and indeed hailed with delight, as heir to the throne. Though a twin, he had been presented alone to the legions, held in the arms of his father; and public opinion pressed high office upon him almost as soon as he could speak. As if in gratitude and affection for the generous action of Marcus at the beginning of the reign, Lucius Verus shortly before his own death advised that the living princes should be made Caesars; their effigies accordingly appeared on coins of 166; in 172 the title of *Germanicus* was shared by Commodus with his father, and after the suppression of the revolt the senate demanded for him still higher dignities.

Nearly two centuries later the Emperor Julian, though an admirer of Marcus, represents him as being reproached on his arrival in heaven with having thus betrayed the empire. Marcus replies: "He was not bad when I entrusted the State to him," and he quotes Jupiter's words to Mars: "Long ago would I have smitten thee with my thunderbolt if it were not that I loved thee, because thou art my son." The council of gods accepted the plea. Earlier than Julian another Emperor, Septimius Severus, unhappy father of Caracalla, was less easily convinced. He emphatically blamed Marcus for not having destroyed Commodus. The worst of fathers have rarely been guilty of that crime, but there may seem to have been, in the case of Commodus, a less drastic alternative; Marcus might conceivably have set his son aside and adopted another successor. The plan, however, was not really possible. In the absence of a son, the emperor might well have adopted and doubtless would have adopted either his son-in-law, Pompeianus, or the

equally capable Pertinax (Avidius Cassius was no more, and would hardly have been a *persona grata*); but as an authentic son had been born, was approaching full manhood, and had been practically recognized as Caesar for a number of years, to set him aside would have been, apart altogether from paternal affection, an act of such doubtful wisdom as to be better called folly. Two considerations must have clinched the matter. First: that, after all, Commodus might improve as his responsibilities increased; Walpole said, centuries later, "I never heard that it is a crime to hope for the best"; with Marcus such a hope was *almost a principle*. Second: that if Commodus were set aside he would become inevitably a danger to the state, the idol and mouthpiece of all the rowdier and baser elements, including his beloved gladiators, (who had no love for Marcus and were more or less out of work); very probably, too, as a victim of disinheritance, Commodus might become an object of compassion and sympathy to many quite respectable citizens.

All things considered, Marcus did the only possible thing. Commodus was raised to the rank formerly occupied by Lucius Verus, and was, in consequence, jointly addressed with Marcus by writers and jointly represented with him on coins and in proclamations. Our wisdom after the event was not a wisdom available to Marcus and his advisors.

Yet the irony of the situation remains.

There is a significant episode in the Fronto *Correspondence* (I, Fronto, 211). Marcus is about twenty-four years old, and Fronto sends him, as theme for consideration and essay-writing, a curious case that he had

come across in history; hardly a case such as Marcus might some day have to consider if he were emperor but, nevertheless, worth his notice as a literary or forensic exercise. "A consul of the Roman people, laying aside his robes, has donned a coat of mail . . . and has slain a lion in the sight of the Roman people. He is denounced before the censors. Put into shape and develop. Farewell." Marcus in his reply asks: "When did it occur and was it in Rome? Do you mean that it took place under Domitian at his Alban Villa? Besides, in such a theme it will take more time to make the fact credible than to treat it with the indignation it deserves. It seems to me an improbable subject." Yet in the years to come the proudest achievements of Commodus were in this very capacity of gladiator.

The interchange throws light on the Roman attitude towards the coarse and cruel games of the amphitheatre. The populace were held fast by two things, the corn dole and the shows (II, *Fronto*, 217); they craved their lions and gladiators as to-day they crave their football and their dog-racing. But a gladiator, though regarded as a necessity of civilization, was also regarded as the lowest of the low, as he generally though not always was; and the idea of a consul making a gladiatorial exhibition of himself called not only for "indignation" but was so incredible as to demand the clearest evidence before Marcus would believe that it had ever happened.

In 177, when Commodus was co-emperor, over thirty years had passed since Marcus wrote that reply to Fronto. Owing to the joint demands of the war and of the humanitarian ideas of Marcus, gladiators were not at their best and most numerous; Commodus, presumably, had not



yet posed as one, and the thought of such a thing happening could hardly have occurred to Marcus. But the youth's tastes were obviously a cause of anxiety.

No mention of Commodus occurs in the *Meditations* except the general reference to the children of Marcus as "not devoid of intelligence nor physically deformed." It is true, some writers have thought that the *Meditations* were written for the special benefit of Commodus, in the hope that when, some day, the youth would come to his senses he might read his father's words with interest and profit. The evidence for this view is slight. The book, as its very title shows, is one of meditations or communings of Marcus "with himself" rather than one of instructions to anyone else. Marcus wished to achieve in his last years or months the rank of a good man.

Two passages, however, we are almost compelled to quote in considering the relations of Marcus and Commodus.

Kindness is irresistible. . . . For what can the most unconscionable of men do to thee if thou persist in being kindly to him, and when a chance is given exhort him mildly and, at the very time when he is trying to do thee harm, quietly teach him a better way thus: *Nay, my child, we have been made for other things. I shall be in no wise harmed, but thou art harming thyself, my child.* Show him delicately and without any personal reference that this is so, and that even honey-bees do not act thus nor any creatures of gregarious instincts. But thou must do thus not in irony or by way of rebuke, but with kindly affection and without any bitterness of heart, not as from a master's chair, nor yet to impress the bystanders, but as if he were indeed alone (XI, 18).

It is conceivable and indeed probable that Marcus was thinking of his son as he wrote these words. What a

depth of tragic meaning we can read into that word "irony!" But it is clear that, in so far as exhortation is intended, the primary exhortation is addressed to Marcus himself.

Here is the second passage in which a reference to Commodus may perhaps be detected:

There is no one so fortunate as not to have one or two standing by his death-bed who will welcome the evil that is befalling him. Say he was a worthy man and a wise; will there not be someone at the very end to say in his heart, *We can breathe again at last, freed from this schoolmaster, not that he was hard on any of us, but I was all along conscious that he tacitly condemns us?* . . . Think then upon this when dying, and thy passing from life will be easier. . . . I am leaving a life in which even my intimates for whom I have so greatly toiled, prayed, and thought, aye even they wish me gone. . . . Howbeit go away with no less kindness towards them on this account. (X, 36).

## CHAPTER XIX

### A GLANCE AT THE *MEDITATIONS*

IN one sense the most important event in the life of Marcus Aurelius was one unrecorded by the chroniclers, and, perhaps, unknown to them; the composition of the *Meditations*. Except for his book, Marcus would be merely one of the more respectable emperors, who had fought the barbarians, had ameliorated the law in the direction of humanity, and had shown some quixotic generousities. To us he would be, perhaps, almost as enigmatic as Hadrian; and impossible though it is for any great soul to be fully understood either by contemporaries or by later ages, it is noteworthy that Hadrian would be a little less enigmatic than he is if his autobiography had not unhappily perished. The *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius lift, as much as any book could do, the veil. While history shows us the emperor engaged, as valiantly as any Trajan, in frontal campaigns against the northern barbarians, the *Meditations* tell a strangely different but complementary story; show him warding off, as it were, from an Army of the Spirit, the guerilla and diminishing assaults of other foes, barbarisms that were already for him becoming bloodless and ghostly, but are recognizable by us as the tormentors of our ancestors and ourselves.

Though some parts of the *Meditations* were apparently written on the frontier during the middle period of the Marcan campaigns, we may regard the date at which we have now arrived as roughly the median date of the composition of the book. And therefore, though the

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present work is no exposition of the *Meditations*, something must be said about the book if for no other reason than the one stated, namely, that the writing of it was the most permanently important event in the emperor's life.

Actually it is a book that demands little formal elucidation; it makes its own impression, which, unless falsified at the very outset by the terms of the translation or the anti-moralizing prejudices of the modern reader, is bound to be substantially true; there is no ambiguity about the general attitude of Marcus. He was too simple and sincere to be a difficult writer, and he was writing for himself and without reserve. Further, even if there were no helpful indications of date and circumstance, we could easily infer that much of the book was the work of an elderly man who had "said *adieu* to happiness" and had almost "totally conquered death" and "could now smile at it, for it had really no more meaning for him." And because it was so written, it demands our attention in these closing chapters.

The words just quoted are those of Renan who, having already overestimated, I think, the moral failure of Lucius Verus and Faustina, has also heightened, perhaps, the failure of Commodus during the emperor's life, even going so far as to describe the last years of Marcus as a "martyrdom." "We can never comprehend all this poor blighted heart suffered, how much bitterness was concealed by that pale face always calm and half smiling."

"A considerable contrast," the reader may remark, "between this impression of the *Meditations* as the work of an acutely suffering man and the one conveyed by the opening chapter of the present book." Strange (unless on a principle of psychological compensation) that the

"Most Beautiful Thanksgiving in Literature" should come from "a poor blighted heart" enduring the bitterness of its "martyrdom"! Even the qualifications introduced in the closing words of Renan do not quite remove the incongruity. "It is true," he says, "that the *adieu* to happiness is the beginning of wisdom and the most certain means of finding happiness. There is nothing so sweet as the return of Joy which follows the renunciation of Joy, nothing so lovely, so profound, so charming as the enchantment of being disenchanted." We have heard of the Paradox of Hedonism before—that the best way to find happiness is to forget all about it;—is it akin to this "Thanksgiving" Paradox? And how far does it apply to Marcus?

I have been tempted to choose a chapter-title—the "Murmurings of Marcus"—whose chief merit, apart from the charm of alliteration, would be that it emphasizes the fact that Marcus, if he had wished to complain, could have found causes in abundance.

But a fundamental point (to which I shall return) is that Marcus believed in Providence. Hardly less important was his Socratic belief that when other men sin they probably sin through ignorance, or that, at least, they should be thus charitably regarded. He never murmurs, therefore, against individuals, against Lucius Verus, or Faustina, or Commodus, though there are towards the end, as we have seen, what may be a couple of anonymous references to his unsatisfactory son. Still, there do come faint murmurings, like those which a doctor hears through the stethoscope, telling of a heart that once knew strain and has not quite forgotten it. Yet the murmurings are slight, and sound far away,

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and one remarks how well, as by some miracle of adjustment, the heart has learnt its new lesson! Salutory for us in these grouching days to listen to the beatings of the heart of Marcus, and to know that a man who had reached, in the opinion of most people but himself, the last stage of moral perfection, who knew—I quote Renan again—that “every object of desire was frivolous,” who had “attained the Buddhist Nirvana,” and had so totally conquered death that he could “smile at it, for it had really no more meaning for him,” retained at least the memory, knew at least the possibility for other men, of *desire*.

All ordinary desires had gone long ago. Scarcely ever, in all probability, had food and drink and sex reached the status of serious episodes in his life. Doubtless the claims of the body for support, and those of the State for hereditary perpetuation, and those of a wife for normal affection had been met, as all duties had to be met; and if pleasure came by the way it was perhaps another sign to Marcus that the Universe was gracious with its Paradox of Hedonism (or what you will), with its unlooked-for boons which called for the Thanksgiving of mortal men. But so far as physical Pleasure was a motive in life and promised to be an open Seducer—that battle, if it had ever needed winning, had been won by Marcus long ago and was now hardly an old, unhappy, far-off memory. More persistent were the battles against Sloth or, to be more exact, against the desire of a strained and overworked man for more sleep. Then came his daily temptation to snub in his heart, if not with his lips, “the busybody, the thankless, the overbearing, the treacherous, the envious, and the unneighbourly” (II, 1),

or to say to the importunate, "I am too busy" (I, 12). It was the victorious outcome of these and similar battles against the petty irritations of life that to-day raises the value of the *Meditations* for us, for it is here that most of us fail most conspicuously. Our Ten Commandments, unconcerned with such humble matters, do not here help us at all, and the Christian world has taken the Beatitudes with such little seriousness as to fail to draw out their applications to daily life, with the result that the best commentary upon them may be found in the writings and person of this very Marcus—Pagan, Stoic, and possibly Persecutor—and in the account he gives of what his teachers taught him about daily duty. It was for this reason that I cast my Chapter IV into a somewhat unusual form, hoping to suggest how rich in practical detail were the Ethics of Stoicism.

Dr. Johnson described Swedish Charles as the "unconquered lord of pleasure and of pain," and the magnificent phrase fits Marcus even better, for, warrior though he became, he had none of the Joy of Battle and Pride of Heart that sent Charles XII on his expeditions. To seek for physical Pleasure was despicable and to shrink from physical Pain was impious; even to fear that death might take a child away or to lament that death had done so, was not worthy of a philosopher, much though that philosopher might love his children and was expected by the moral law to do so; a man is called upon to be lord of Pain of Mind as well as of Pain of Body. But the battle was never quite over, even with our saint of Paganism; there were more foes to conquer than the formidable and well-recognized Two.

True, the love of Fame, that last infirmity of noble

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mind, was conquered very soon, whatever faint murmurings might still sometimes come from within. The love of Popularity had no chance from the first, for it had no place in the conduct of the beloved Antoninus; Marcus, with immense moral courage, would refuse extortionate demands of his soldiers as firmly as he would defy the public opinion of the amphitheatre. But a man on whom in his youth there had been lavished the best tutorial instruction of the time and who had listened to Fronto's exhortations to be a brilliant speaker, could not but be conscious now and then, as year followed year and the end of life loomed more nearly on his vision, that by turning away from these things he had lost not only some repute among the highbrows but some delight for himself. We read in the *Correspondence* of hexametric exercises (I, *Fronto*, 125, 139) and in the *Meditations* (III, 14) of a book of the *Acts of the Romans and Greeks*, perhaps a literary design that Marcus had abandoned at the call of other duties. Further: "Sharpness of wit men cannot praise thee for" (V, 5), a charge which may have meant, among other things, that Marcus had not cultivated the art of small talk or had put to little quotational use his knowledge of Horace and Ovid among the westerns, and Aristophanes and his own contemporary Lucian among the easterns; the light or heavy, clean or dirty wit of these men did not rise easily to his memory or his lips, nor did he supply the lack of it by jocosities of his own. Though at twenty-two he could have been seen attending the theatre at Naples, he was already bored by it; "the same theatre, the same dislike of it, the same longing for you"; and as to Horace, "don't mention him again; he is dead and done with, so



far as I am concerned" (I, *Fronto*, 139-41). Rather hard on Horace, perhaps; but anyhow, though it is clear from the *Correspondence* that Marcus had tried in his youth to cultivate the spirit of L'Allegro, and could crack a joke and play a prank now and then, from the time of his full accession to the throne, when responsibilities and anxieties crowded on him with a rush, the nearest approach to merriment was probably that pensive and hardly noticeable smile which the historians speak of and the sculptors depict. Whenever now the sense of a Lost or Unattained Paradise of mirth and good spirits and brilliant conversational or literary achievement came back to him, as it did now and then, it came under the quaint disguise of self-depreciation. *Fronto* had praised him exultantly in years gone by, but now "sharpness of wit men cannot praise thee for"; on the contrary, some of the men around him were calling him a proser, a bore, and a school-master (X, 36).

All such faint stirrings of literary egotism he thrust resolutely back into the subconscious. If he could not be witty he could at least be good; that was within his power if brilliance was not; he could be "kindly, independent, frugal, serious, high-minded" (V, 5). If he failed here it was his own fault. Into one simple reminder and resolution he concentrates the beauty and sweetness of the moral universe. "*Let others say or do what they will, I must for my part be good*" (VII, 15).

But even in this very pursuit of virtue he discerned a danger. Instead of pride of wit there might be spiritual pride. "When thou flatterest thyself most that thou art engaged in worthy tasks thou art then most of all deluded" (VI, 13). He had once, long ago, felt satis-

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faction when he had made a successful speech; he had reproved himself and been in turn reproved by Fronto.\* And now, into a heart vacant of ordinary and even extraordinary cravings, fears, and sloths, there might creep at times a subtle feeling of self-satisfaction at the very contemplation of its austere emptiness. But even here the anti-toxin was ready. Rusticus, anticipating some modern critics of the supposed vice of priggishness, and evidently aware of the extraordinary qualities of the princely youth committed to his care, had warned him against "posing ostentatiously as the moral athlete or unselfish man"; hence, against this pleasure, too, for all its tenuity, Marcus had become so watchful that, as we have seen, he composed an amazing chronicle of other men's perfections and prefaced it challengingly and monitorially to his own book; the human lust to criticize and slander and complain he transmuted into a habit of objective eulogy, humbling to his own claims to virtue. In this field alone he is personal instead of anonymous; he recalls men by name in order that he may luxuriate for once in the sense of abounding virtue—the virtue of others than himself.

Still the murmurings return. These men whom he praises are mostly dead (though Sextus of Chaeronea, Sextus the Boeotian, is blessedly alive still), and around him now stand others who, though respectful enough, are less congenial than those with whom he had passed the early and middle years of his life. A change seemed to be taking place in men's thoughts; strange waves of sensational and unphilosophical religiosity were coming from the East, this Christianity and other creeds; perhaps

\* Above, pp. 115-116.

Stoicism, which he had embraced so lovingly at twelve years old, was already on the wane, and he may have begun to feel himself one of the last of the faithful, as Julian was to feel, with even more reason, at a later time. Could it be that forty years of philosophic rule had by the very merits of that rule dulled the evangelic keenness which had animated the partisans of the noble creed when its most eminent advocate had been a Phrygian slave, and not an emperor, and when Stoicism had its real martyrs? Something, at any rate, was wrong either with himself or with the men around the throne, and at times he would say: "This alone, if anything, would draw us back and bind us to life—if it were but permitted us to live with those who have possessed themselves of the same principles as ours" (IX, 3). What an environment it was, what sort of characters were they with whom he had to consort! "It is very far from right to be disgusted with them" (as, alas! to my bitter sorrow, I am, however much I try to the contrary), "but rather even to befriend and deal gently with them, yet it is well to remember that not from men of like principles with thine will thy release be."

"Release!" The word has an ominous sound; the youthful Marcus has evidently gone for ever; the summit of life has been passed. Release; yes, that was it. But where could it be found? Books, the old familiar books of Epictetus and others, would give a little release or at least a little distraction; but it was a selfish release or a selfish distraction so far as it took one away from the duties of life. Selfish, yet all too attractive as the years rolled on! The word "mother" was sweet to Marcus on its own account and the sweeter, perhaps, as there

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was hardly the trace of a "father" memory to compete with it; and now philosophy persisted in presenting itself at times as his "mother" while the duties of the court suggested the severe if not repellent features of a step-mother (VI, 12); to desert those duties, and the daily routine of life, and the jarring of the spirit with foolish men, and to retire into solitude with one's books seemed sometimes all too, too attractive to the ailing Marcus. In his youth, how joyfully, how buoyantly he had studied! and how much more profitably he might study now, with his deeper experience of life, if only the opportunity could be his! One might even find interest in that amusing Lucian whom men were talking about, the open foe, it was rumoured, of Alexander of Abonoteichos and, alas! a scoffer at the gods and too often at the Stoics and Cynics, though occasionally respectful as in his *Life of Demonax*. Or one might give serious study to the creed of the Christians, who were a nuisance in military matters and a problem in judicial. But the opportunity will now hardly be his, and there is no junior emperor, no Lucius Verus, to whom he can hand over the reins of power; there is nobody but Commodus, and to retire into the sweetness of philosophical pursuits and to leave the empire to Commodus would be plainly selfish even if it were possible. He must fix his heart once again on other things, the supreme things for the Stoic; the old, old demands of Duty and Moral Improvement. "*Thou canst not be a student*. But thou canst refrain from insolence, thou canst rise superior to pleasures and pains, thou canst tread under thy feet the love of glory, thou canst forbear to be angry with the unfeeling and the thankless, aye, and even care for them" (VIII, 8). "Away

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with thy books! Be no longer drawn aside by them'' (II, 2).

Duty, and then Release! But not Release by any retirement into the wilderness or the library. What about the release of Death? That is bound to come and sometimes it can be hastened.

## MARCUS AND THE DEATH PROBLEM

DEATH loomed large in the mind of every Stoic, and never was there man who had prepared himself better for the last crisis than Marcus Aurelius. Such events as the revolt of Avidius Cassius, and the visit to the universities of the East may at times have driven from his mind the more personal aspects of the great problem, as may also, a year or two later, the opening of the new war with the barbarians; but between the two groups of events, and later in his camp on the Danube, the all-important matter must have become a constant preoccupation for the fragile emperor with the sixties of his life not very far away.

One implication of his death is absent from the *Meditations*, the very one that we should expect to be present, namely the fate of the empire after his passing. That Marcus was a loyal son of Rome is manifest by every action of his life; never would he sacrifice his imperial and military duties, even the most petty or odious, to his cravings for retirement or study. As he thought of the future of the empire, something of the same anxiety, we should imagine, must often have assailed him as came to our Edward I when, at Winchester in 1307, he heard the news of the Scottish rising. Was the work of the last ten years to be undone? Edward was sixty-eight when he died, Marcus was fifty-eight, and each had a son whose temperament rendered it unlikely that the task bequeathed to him would be successfully accomplished or even piously attempted.

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We know that Edward, facing the doubt as he moved slowly northward in lassitude and sickness, conjured both son and nobles to leave his body unentombed until the rebel nation had been conquered. We know of that last desperate desertion of the litter for the horse at Carlisle and the collapse at Burgh-on-the-Sands. Is there anything like this in the case of Marcus Aurelius?

There is a little, it seems, as we read the narrative of Dio Cassius, but far less than, in our ignorance, we might have expected. Marcus was faithful to the empire but he was not impassioned of it, as Edward was impassioned of the conquest of Scotland. Stoicism left room for no passions except those for Duty and the City of God. But it did, in a kind of high-grade pantheistic indulgence, unusual for so cold and impersonal a creed, leave room for Providence. Though Edward I could not die in peace as he thought of Scotland and the Prince of Wales, Marcus could die in something like resignation as he thought of the empire and Commodus. All would happen as a gracious Providence designed, and after a man had done his duty he should not fret.

One phase of the bitterness of death was thus perhaps spared to Marcus, though we may be permitted to doubt whether the sparing was quite complete. Another had been certainly dissipated for educated men by the work of Epicurus and Lucretius.

Some of us are old enough to remember how the torments of hell, though not taught us at home or very expressly at school or church, yet played their part in our youthful nightmares. What those torments meant during nearly two thousand years of Christian theology the newer generation can only faintly conceive. And few

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people realize that hell has been no Christian monopoly, and that the fear of it, or of some equivalent, was felt by pagans too; that, indeed, the hell of the Christians was no exclusively Jewish hell but was partly borrowed, like so much of what we call Christianity, from pagan religions. Now it was the supreme merit of Epicurus (in the opinion of his disciple Lucretius, and of Virgil, apparently echoing Lucretius) that he had banished from men's minds the fear of hell. "Blessed," said Virgil, "is he who has been able to win knowledge of the causes of things and has cast beneath his feet all fear and unyielding Fate, and the howls of hungry Acheron."\* That blessed, divine man was Epicurus, and to have banished these terrors was, in the view of his followers, his greatest achievement.

The praises, nearly ecstatic, lavished on Epicurus by Lucretius and Lucian can only be fully understood if this fear of hell was a very real fear among the pagans. One is almost compelled to believe that it had once obsessed the majestic Latin poet to morbidity, so great was his sense of relief when the liberating doctrines came his way. Astonishing at any rate is the praise that he lavishes in his great poem on

the Man of Greece who first dared to uplift mortal eye against religion, for neither fables of the gods would quell him, nor thunderbolts. . . . Forth he marched beyond the flaming walls of the heavens, . . . whence victorious he returns, bearing his prize . . . knowledge . . . Wherefore Religion is now in her turn cast down and trampled underfoot.

"Impiety?" On the contrary, he says, "too often it is . . . Religion which has brought forth criminal and im-

\* *Georgics* II, 490-3.



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pious deeds," and he sums up this part of his work in the ever famous line

Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.

But the achievement of Epicurus was, after all, not so assured as Lucretius would have liked. He was afraid that the "power of the priests with their terrific utterances" might be too strong even for his friend Memmius: "if men saw that a limit had been set to tribulation" the priests could be defied, but the fear of eternal punishment in gloomy Orcus, or of some transmigration into animals, was prone to recur even to the enlightened. Epicureanism could only repeat its comfort, cold comfort to many people to-day—for in banishing Hell it also banished Heaven—but intoxicating to Lucretius:

The fear of Acheron [must] be [driven away] which troubles the life of man from its deepest depths, suffuses all with the blackness of death, and leaves no delight clean and pure. . . . Men have betrayed fatherland or beloved parents in seeking to avoid the regions of Acheron.

And Lucretius goes on to refer to men who declare that death is less to be feared than disease or infamy, but who, nevertheless, refuse to kill themselves, nay, offer up the traditional sacrifices, showing that they fear death and the gods or ghosts all the time (*De Natura Rerum*, III, 37-54).

Obstinate is the fear of death, even among philosophers: arguments are not so effective as they should be:

"Not ours," say some, "the thought of death to dread;  
Asking no heaven, we fear no fabled hell;  
Life is a feast, and we have banqueted—  
Shall not the worms as well?"

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The after-silence, when the feast is o'er,  
And void the places where the minstrels stood,  
Differs in nought from what hath been before,  
And is nor ill nor good."

Which is a paraphrase by Sir William Watson\* of Lucretius;

Death is nothing to us . . . since the nature of the mind is understood to be mortal; and as in time past was felt no distress, while from all quarters the Carthaginians were coming to the conflict, so when we shall no longer be, . . . then sure enough nothing at all will be able to happen to us, . . . not if earth be commingled with sea and sea with sky.

It seems strange at first that Marcus makes no reference to Lucretius who, more elaborately than any other familiar writer (the works of Epicurus have only come down to us in fragments) has sought to remove the fear of death. Marcus often refers to the theory of atoms taught by Democritus, Epicurus, and the Latin poet, and he admits it as one of the great alternative theories of the cosmos. Moreover, on matters of practical conduct the conclusions of Stoicism were not markedly different from those of Epicureanism, and though it might seem that a double allegiance was inconceivable, Marcus was sufficiently broadminded to appreciate in some measure the founder of the rival school. "Even Epicurus," he notes, "has said something wise about pain: 'When unbearable it destroys us, when lasting it is bearable' " (VII, 64, 33): nay, we should imitate Epicurus in his illness (IX, 41), and nourish our souls, as he recommended, by the remembrance of eminently virtuous men (XI, 26). But nowhere does Marcus find it necessary to

\* *The Great Misgiving.*

refer to the poem of Lucretius or to the crowning achievement, as the poet esteemed it, of Epicurus, the banishment of the torments of an after-life. We can safely conclude that he had no belief in those torments though, as we have seen, Justin Martyr had tried them on him; any horror he felt about death was lest it should be followed neither by bliss nor by torments but by nothingness; the doubt

. . . whether, stepping forth, my soul shall see  
New prospects, or fall sheer—a blinded thing!  
There is, O grave, thy hourly victory,  
And there, O death, thy sting.

Stoicism was really more ambiguous than Epicureanism on this subject. Quite frankly the Epicureans denied a future life, and the poem of Lucretius was largely motivated by the desire to establish this denial on scientific grounds. But the Stoics could not be quite sure and Epictetus had been sturdily negative. In the end, no doubt, the individual was reabsorbed into the whole out of which he had come; meanwhile . . .? On the other hand, quite as earnestly as the Epicureans urged a "fortuitous concourse of atoms," the Stoics urged a "Providence"; though side by side with that vague belief they urged that every man had the right to be his own providence to the extent of committing suicide if no useful purpose could be served by his remaining alive.

The question whether Marcus, in the end, hastened his own death will have to be considered in the next chapter; in approaching it we must realize that there was in his time something like a Cult of Death, particularly associated with the philosophic school of the

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Cynics. Marcus, who was not above quoting Epicurus, was still less likely to neglect Antisthenes, the founder of the Cynic school (VII, 36); he speaks with approval of Diogenes, its most picturesque representative (VIII, 3), and of Crates (VI, 13); his own Stoicism was closely akin to Cynicism.

The Cynic professors of the age of Marcus were so prominently in the public eye as to become the special butt of Lucian who was tempted by his sense of the ridiculous to regard them as hypocrites, fonder of life and money than they pretended. But many were obviously sincere and some were employed as domestic chaplains, whose task was to teach their patrons to get rid of the fear of death. One lecturer on the philosophy of suicide had his class-rooms dangerously crowded, and, as we have read, a certain Cynic Peregrinus succeeded in creating a world-wide sensation.

The reader will remember how, according to Lucian, Peregrinus began his career by adultery and parricide, and then "came across the priests and scribes of the Christians, in Palestine, and picked up their queer creed." Afterwards he left the Christians or was expelled by them; then sought in Egypt for notoriety as a Stoic or Cynic with unusually extravagant follies; still later took ship for Italy and began to abuse the generous Emperor (Antoninus Pius). "He was in everyone's mouth as the philosopher who was banished for being too outspoken." Lastly, he tried Greece, attacked Herodes Atticus for having provided Olympia with a water-supply, found his notoriety waning, published his intention of cremating himself, and did so. It is just possible, as Professor Bury suggests, that Peregrinus was less of

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an impostor than Lucian imagined; that he felt it his duty to carry Cynic and Stoic ideas to their conclusion and to give an example to the world of contempt for death. But Lucian's view is the prevalent one, and the career of Peregrinus, unless he has been grossly libelled, was not such as to give him the benefit of any doubt.

The point of the matter is that there was at this time something like a systematic propaganda directed towards overcoming the fear of death. The example of Montanist Christians, who were eager for martyrdom, must not be forgotten in this connection.

Marcus was in full sympathy neither with Peregrinus nor with the Christian martyrs, but he was too good a Stoic not to be impressed, as his fifties drew near to an end, by their views. Suicide, in certain circumstances, he was willing to approve. But soaring high above that detail of Stoic Ethics was the doctrine of Providence, the belief that in some attenuated but genuine form there was Love and Foresight in the universe.

One's mind turns, in considering this subject of the attitude of Marcus to death, to the works of the great symbolical painter of Victorian times. Watts was a modern Stoic, as Mr. G. K. Chesterton, in his days of vision, discerned, and his paintings on this theme would have accorded well, even if not exactly, with the mood and principles of Marcus. LOVE AND DEATH: Love, opposing its frail protest to the invincible advance into the sick chamber of that draped figure whose face is hidden but whose benignity is faintly inferrable from its gestures. Vain to oppose Death, Marcus, too, reminds us; better to welcome her if we individually can; and well for mankind if, by a herculean effort of education,

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the last and greatest achievement of the human spirit, men can stoop to conquer her. SIC TRANSIT: Death, apparently the Conqueror yet not the All-Conqueror; the corpse, it is true, lies under the shroud, and the glories of man's blood and state lie abandoned; but the curtain above speaks to us three several messages from the grave: "What I spent I had: what I saved I lost: what I gave I have." They might be those of Marcus himself, though the last of the three is a little too exuberant in its accent; he would have preferred, "What I gave I gave." THE COURT OF DEATH, where the nobleman lays down his coronet, the knight his sword, the cripple his crutch, and the ailing maiden her weakness, and where the Beyond is left in the guardianship of Mystery and Silence. Marcus, too, leaves it in their guardianship, though he cannot refrain from plucking at times, like the figure in Watts's best-known picture, at the single remaining harp-string and extracting from it a haunting, pensive music.

Watts was a Stoic painter, a painter, therefore, of the breed of Marcus; they both leave Mystery and Silence on guard, but they both seek to assure us that Death may be a friend.

A Friend? In the case of Marcus almost a *Lover*.

If amatory images had risen more familiarly to his mind he might have said with Claudio,

I will encounter Darkness as a Bride  
And hug it in mine arms.

And Claudio said this, we must remember, after an exhortation which has every appearance of being derived from Stoic rather than Christian sources. The speech of the duke in the beginning of Act III, Scene I of *Measure*

*for Measure* reads almost like a paraphrase of the later parts of the *Meditations*.

That book, in addition to being a Thanksgiving for other men's virtues and a Handbook of reminders about daily conduct, is also the Epithalamion of Death, a Paean with Death as its theme. To murmur against Death is palpably to have failed in life, and therefore one's efforts should be directed to prevent that impious murmuring, that ultimate failure. Death must not merely be submitted to: it must be rejoiced in; if possible, be hugged in the arms of Thanksgiving. Those arms which, in the case of Marcus, already embraced so much that was strange and forbidding, must be opened wide for their last great task.

The fact that he had to make some effort to this end shows that he had not quite reached the stage described by Renan, the stage of total conquest, "when he could smile at Death, for it really had no more meaning for him." Towards the very end this was probably the case, but when he was writing the *Meditations* he was only approaching that stage; Death had still, so to speak, a little life remaining in her and awaited the *coup de grâce* from one or other or all of the argumentative weapons of Marcus.

His chief weapon was his sublime though tenuous Faith in Providence, that all was really *well*, despite appearances to the contrary, and that willing submission to death, as to the contingencies of Life, was one of the supreme duties of man.

The grandest expression of this Faith is the well-known passage already quoted: "All that is in tune with thee, O Universe, is in tune with me! Nothing that is

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in due time for thee is too early or too late for me! All that thy seasons bring, O Nature, is fruit for me! All things come from thee, subsist in thee, go back to thee. There is one who says *Dear City of Cecrops*. Wilt thou not say *O Dear City of Zeus?*" (IV, 23). This willing Submission is the Final Piety, and should accompany the Supreme Duty of going on "from social act to social act" (VI, 7), of "dovetailing one good act on to another so as not to leave the smallest gap between" (XII, 29). It were well to leave no gap lest the longings for the unattainable should revive.

The doctrine of submission to Nature and her "seasons" and "due times" is often amplified by Marcus, and we are reminded that just as Birth is natural so too is Death. And thus it comes about that many passages in the *Meditations* are concerned with pouring contempt upon man's Last Enemy or trying to transform a figure of Terror into a friend or even a lover.

Marcus here found some value—a rather quaint value—in analysing living processes into their crude elements. It is not a scientific interest at all to which he appeals; he thanks the gods, in fact, that he was not drawn aside to such speculations (closing words of *Meditations*, Book I), and only once, perhaps, does he breathe a faint sigh of regret at this deprivation (VII, 67). His interest is moral and indeed ascetic, though elsewhere he recognizes the scientific greatness of such men as Hipparchus and Archimedes. To remember that we have once been a little mucus and ultimately shall become a mummy or a handful of ashes was a wholesome antidote to our foolish cravings for life on earth. As a logical argument the reflection is worthless, being a



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mere restatement of the grim fact of mortality; but as an instrument of spiritual culture, as a way of reminding us of the proportions of things and the vanity of human wishes, it has its uses. *Respice finem.*

Thou'rt not thyself,  
For thou exist'st on many a thousand grains  
That issue out of dust.

The same is true of his frequent references to the passing away of his predecessors in the purple, from the first Caesar to the beloved Antoninus Pius. One after another men (and emperors) die: one after another the people who personally mourned for them also die; then the people who mourned for the mourners: and very soon you, Marcus, will be dead too; it is all the way of Nature, and perish the thought that it is not somehow a beneficent and gracious way! And here again we note that though, as a reminder of the foolishness of human pride and the fickleness of human glory, this reflection is sound enough, only a man of the saintly type to which Marcus belonged could have found much comfort in it.

One other curious argument Marcus employed to reconcile himself to Death. A man who lives forty years, he says, sees everything that a man even in the distant future can see of the world. Nay, even our children "will see nothing fresh" (XI, 1). For the Stoic there was "nothing new under the sun," because everything moved in cycles. Why, then, wish to live on?

Here Marcus is using a plea that we cannot to-day accept. True, the idea of human progress, dating (we are commonly told) from the French Revolution but actually found among some of the Puritan sects of the English Civil War period, has of recent years been

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doubted or denied in certain of its bearings. The progress of the world in spiritual things seems not quite certain. On the other hand, the fact of scientific progress is obvious to the meanest understanding. New marvels are revealed or invented every year, and the intelligent man who lives to eighty has a real advantage in this sense, over the one who dies at sixty or forty. We hear men say, indeed, "I should like to live long enough to see television, or . . ." All this was quite outside the circle of our emperor's thought and, indeed, the thought of the ancient world.

But what about a belief in Immortality? Is not this the real and sovereign remedy for the imperfections of the world and the sadness they bring; the magic formula which gives meaning to life and transforms Death into friend, lover, or bride? Marcus has a good deal to say about Immortality but not exactly as a remedy for the world's imperfections. The world is not imperfect; Death is *not* a sad fact but a necessary and glorious aspect of the Nature of Things. The Universe has to be renewed, and Death is the way of renewal. "The constant change of parts keeps the whole Universe ever youthful and in its prime. All that is advantageous to the whole is ever fair and in its bloom. The ending of life, then, . . . is a good, since it is timely for the Universe. . . . The man who . . . is borne along on the same path as God and borne in his judgement towards the same things, is indeed a man god-borne" (XII, 23).

Sublime faith, this; and provided that it does not result in mere quietism and cause a forgetting of the supreme Duty aforesaid, a helpful faith for many men. But does it hang together with the rest of the creed of Marcus,

with the supreme Duty above referred to, for example? If all's right with the world, God being securely located in His heaven, why this eagerness to do good to men by one social act after another? Are not social acts an admission that there is evil or need in the Universe, and that men must put things right? No, Marcus would probably reply; social acts are not responses to an imperfect Universe but the natural outcome of our divine nature. We are born for fellowship, each of us is "a limb of the organized body of rational things" (VII, 13).

But one doubt does, in fact, assail Marcus though he does not put it in the extreme form that is possible. Very good men die, and, he might have added, die sometimes young or in distressing circumstances. "Some of mankind, and they especially good men, who have had as it were the closest commerce with the Divine, and by devout conduct and acts of worship, have been in the most intimate fellowship with it," die (XII, 5), and it is not clear that, like the *Happy Warrior* of Watts and the more aged figure in the same painter's *Messenger*, there is always peace and joy in the end. Gladstone, at any rate, was not so optimistic; Death had been gentle with Sidney Herbert, he said, but was not so always. And—the all-important question—are such men wholly extinguished?

Faith conquers even here, but barely conquers. If they are "wholly extinguished" it is because extinction is the best thing. But it is possible that they are not wholly extinguished!

Quite fairly he faces the alternatives. We live in either

- (1) A Universe of chaos without design.
- (2) A Universe of rigid Fate.
- (3) A Universe of gracious Providence.

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He does not contemplate the fourth alternative of an Evolving Universe with a heritage of anachronisms and an endowment of possibilities. If, he says, we accept (1), we must train our own Ruling Reason to guide us through the bewildering chaos. If we accept (2), we must learn to submit. If we accept (3), we must "render ourselves worthy of divine succour." On the whole he hopes that (3) is the true explanation, and if it is there is some possibility of immortality for the good man at least. And even if you are carried away long before reaching old age—dismissed from the stage after playing in only three acts instead of five—you should "*depart with a good grace, for he that dismisses thee is gracious.*"

These are the last words of the *Meditations* but, remarkable as they are, being really an effort to believe that "God is Love," they are not perhaps so remarkable as certain others. To see a beauty in Death because it is the summons of a gracious God, or at least a gracious Universe, is an act of faith, and its validity depends on the assumption of the graciousness of the Universe, which some critics deny. Marcus, though inclining to that view, was aware of two others less attractive. But there was one charm in Death which could not be destroyed by any critic, because it did not depend on any assumption.

Many years before, Fronto had faced the problem of Death from the angle of his own bereavements. He had reviewed the alternative theories—three, though not quite the same as the three of Marcus—and he had added that, even if immortality were true, as he hoped, it was not an unimpeachable compensation for the loss of the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a

voice that was still. And then, with something of the defiance of Job in his words, he declared that when his last hour came he would "hail the heavens" with a plea that his life had been a righteous one, that he had done nothing dishonourable, that he had, on the contrary, done many good deeds even to the ungrateful (II, *Fronto*, 225-31).

Fronto was probably as good a man as he claimed to be, but between him and his pupil there yawned a gulf. Marcus could never have written that letter, assertive of personal virtue and impeaching the universe. Explain it how we will—that Marcus had "been born" again, or that he had been "born different" from other men, or that he had, as Capitolinus said, been "lent by the gods," or that he had somehow achieved moral victories which for most other men are too remote to be really conceivable—the fact remains that whereas Fronto's spirituality was merely that of an honest and honourable man, the spirituality of Marcus was that of a saint, unconscious of his own astonishing condition. He who began his *Meditations* by recording the goodness of others could find no room in them for the record of his own. He therefore utters no challenge in the style of Job or Fronto; his virtues, so manifest to other men that they "made bad men good and good men very good" are not manifest to himself; they are not accomplished achievements for him, but remote possibilities; they belong to the future not to the past or the present. And alas! he may never become a good man at all, for time is now setting against him; "life is short." But terribly short though it is for social acts and for self improvement, it may in the end prove too long. There is ample time for *failure*.

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The maxim that "while there is life there is hope" was transformed by Marcus, this amazing Epicure of the Spirit, into "While there is life there is danger." It was Death, not Life, that should be clad in the blue robes of Hope, and of a blue, indeed, that hardly ever was on sea or land, symbolizing a quality that hardly ever was in man or woman. The Hope of Marcus was not the Hope of a quite assured immortality but almost as strangely tenuous as that of Watts's picture.

*If you are dead you will not be able to sin against mankind, against the thankless, the overbearing, and the rest of the folk anonymously catalogued at the beginning of the Second Book, nor against the Inner and Ruling Reason in any of its admonitions.* The long struggle for perfection will be ended, not in victory (that is too much to hope for), but at least with banner still flying and sword still in hand. The Terror of Failure, and particularly the growing Terror of Failure through Dotage, will be over, the Terror of a Weakening Conscience or of an Animal Existence with the mind in decay. Such final Failure will be once and for ever excluded and impossible. Seeing then "how thou art driven by sheer weariness at the jarring discord of thy life," it were well to cry "Tarry not, O Death, lest peradventure I too forget myself." Except others of his beloved Stoics, Marcus was almost the only man in history who has seen in Death that priceless charm. And it seems probable that as a conscientious member of the austere fellowship he may have hastened the coming of the Deliverer.

## CHAPTER XXI

### LAST DAYS

BUT now Marcus was called upon to leave Rome for the last time. When the revolt of Avidius Cassius upset his plans on the frontier a permanent conquest of the barbarians seemed well in sight. The revolt gave these troublers their chance, and in 178 the work had to begin again.

The time that Marcus passed at Rome between his return from the East and his final departure for the frontier on what was called the "Second German Expedition" he devoted in some small measure to philosophical pursuits. The phrase will not mislead any reader who has followed our story. To retire from executive life in order to contemplate the scheme of existence, the perfections of God, and the depravity or even the virtues of humanity, was no part of Stoicism.

Now and then, as we have seen, Marcus craved for a life among books, far away from unreasoning and irritating men and from a somewhat unsatisfactory son. But he dismissed the thought as a temptation. "Away with thy books! Be no longer drawn aside by them" (II, 2). "Men seek out retreats for themselves in the country, by the seaside, on the mountains, and thou [Marcus] art wont to long intensely for such things. But all this is unphilosophical to the last degree when thou canst at a moment's notice retire into thyself" (IV, 3). Retirement from duty was impossible for a Stoic so long as strength, sanity, and opportunity remained, and

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though Marcus, now not many years distant from his sixties, and about to start for a campaign which might keep him away from Rome for the rest of his life, evidently spent some of his brief respite in the study of philosophy, there was no cessation in his obedience to the calls of public service on the home front. One of those calls may have concerned, as I have said, the Christians, and it is certain that if he did persecute them he did it—like the Christian persecutors themselves at a later stage—as a matter of conscience.

There occurred about this time, or perhaps during the actual campaign that followed, another of those disastrous earthquakes to which the cities of Asia Minor were so subject; this time not Cyzicus but Smyrna was involved. Now Smyrna had its associations for Marcus, and when there came from Aristides, with whom, as we have seen, he had interchanged thoughts only a year or two before, a lament over the utter destruction of the city, the emperor, we are told, sighed repeatedly; and when he read the rhetorician's eloquent description of the breezes blowing over a desolate spot once busy with life, "he beheld the city and wept over it." The quotation and the parallel from Holy Writ will not be adjudged inappropriate by a reader who realizes how truly Marcus Aurelius took the world's sorrows to his heart and its burdens on his shoulders. The proposals of Aristides for the restoration of Smyrna, addressed to the two emperors, were accepted, and Aristides afterwards received from the citizens in recognition of the services rendered by his eloquence the honour of a statue and the title of the "builder" of Smyrna, a title equally belonging to Marcus.

What other executive demands were made upon



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Marcus during this last residence in Rome we can only guess in general terms. But we do know, as I have said, that philosophy, the first love of his life, the love which neither the persuasions of Fronto nor the charms of Faustina had ever yet made him forget, was not quite forgotten. He who had sat in the lecture rooms of Alexandria, Smyrna, and Athens, could now be seen at Rome attending the lectures of the relative of Plutarch, named "Sextus of Boeotia," concerning whom, the reader will remember, Marcus felt that "simply to be with him was delightful." It was in these last months, presumably, that Marcus experienced that "delight" in the highest degree and had glimpses into the philosopher's household, "patriarchally governed"; and he must have wished, at the sight of such domestic peace and promise, that one member of his own household were more satisfactory.

Philostratus tells us that a certain visitor to Rome from Greece met the emperor in the street about this time and asked him whither he was going. The reply was, "It is good even for an old man to learn. I am now on my way to Sextus the Philosopher to learn what I do not yet know." And the visitor raising his hand to heaven, said, "O Zeus, the king of the Romans in his old age takes up his tablets and goes to school!" One thinks of Goethe doing likewise, but Goethe was not an emperor, tied to the executive headship of the world.

We are told, too, that Marcus gave lectures as well as attended them, one lecture, on finance, was addressed to the senate. Perhaps the First Book of the *Meditations*, with its very systematic catalogue of lessons learnt and to be learnt, owes something of its character to this

moment in his life, in which as it were, Marcus brought together the threads of his thought and experience.\*

We are told that his last subject, before setting out for the frontier, was the *ordo praeceptionum*, and that the lecture lasted three days. It was a suitable theme for a Stoic philosopher and ruler saying good-bye to his subjects. Now, is it not clear that the First Book is a collection of precepts, culled with love and remembrance from past and present; and is it not so different from the rest of the book in design and possessed of so systematic and comprehensive a form, that, though essentially a private thanksgiving, it may have been also used for valedictory lecture purposes? And one naturally asks, Did Marcus nourish the hope of Commodus attending these lectures, and did the prince, in fact, attend them? Book One becomes a more significant and pathetic document than ever if we regard it in this fashion. Or did Marcus, as the day of his departure drew near, altogether relinquish the thought of a conversion of his son by philosophy and to philosophy, and fix a last hope in the steadying influence of married life? Dio Cassius says of this moment that he "gave his son a wife, Crispina, sooner than he wished." It is pretty certain, at any rate, that, for all his belief in providence, his mind dwelt at times on the Commodus problem, as did also the mind of every thoughtful Roman.

The many and solemn ceremonies that attended the earlier departure of Marcus for the frontier were not, apparently, rehearsed in such fullness on this occasion. The position was not so desperate as when, in 166, the

\* Pater, in *Marius the Epicurean*, extends this possibility to other books of the *Meditations*, and is here probably wrong.

frontier had been broken and the barbarians had reached even the cities of Venetia. There was no disaster this time, but the Quintilli brothers had been "unable to end the war," the constant strain on the Pannonian garrisons needed to be relieved, and it seemed advisable that the plans which had been near accomplishment on the occasion of the rebellion of Avidius Cassius should if possible be carried out.

But though the extraordinary religious devotions and appeals of the earlier departure may have been somewhat curtailed on this occasion, we are told by Dio Cassius of the solemn hurling of the bloody spear, kept in the temple of Bellona, in the direction of the enemy's country. Bellona was sister (or possibly wife) of Mars, of which last god Marcus, we have learnt, was Salian Priest; and even in these his last days he could not neglect the rites any more than the duties of a son of Rome; the spear was accordingly hurled with all due ceremony, and we to-day can think of it as a symbol, to remain valid for two and a half centuries more, of Rome's defiance of the barbarians. Then Marcus followed the troops that had already been sent forward, and battles with the enemy tribes and negotiations with the friendly ones took place, and we hear of a great victory achieved by Paternus, in consequence of which Marcus was proclaimed emperor for the tenth time. The policy of embodying the barbarians in the empire was continued side by side with the retention of garrisons in forts among the most hostile of the tribes. And though the actual place where Marcus died may either be as far west as Vienna or as far south-east as Mitrovitz, one writer has pictured his last months among the desolate marshes of the Hungarian Danube,

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“one of the most melancholy regions in Europe,” where “the forces of nature run to waste without use or beauty.” Despite such surroundings, the ravages of the endemic plague, and the poor health of Marcus himself, the frontier was successfully held, and fortune was even smiling on the Roman arms when Marcus died on March 17, 180.

The scandal-mongers could never let so notable an event pass without employing their ingenuity upon it, and the historians have availed themselves of their efforts. Dio Cassius, who had no reason in later years for loving Commodus, had been “plainly told” that the physicians, wishing to do Commodus a favour, put Marcus to death. Such poison tales have been far too frequent in history, and the after-career of Commodus affords so plausible an explanation of how this piece of absurd scandal arose that we need not accept it. Even Dio Cassius does not allege that Commodus took the initiative in this matter of his father’s death, and he elsewhere, as we have seen, describes the youth as “not naturally wicked”; while to imagine that physicians, who probably loved Marcus as well as most men loved him and may have seen how near he was to death, would have ventured on an act of villainy for a highly problematic and indeed infinitely perilous end, and that, after perpetrating it, they let their tongues wag about it, is to strain our credulity to the uttermost. Would not Commodus, who, if he became a homicidal maniac, had at least some human lust for popularity, have gladly sent such men to death and thus merited the title “pius”—he was fond of titles—in its superlative form, if there had been the least suspicion of their guilt? It is well to remember that Marcus in all

probability was the best loved and the most widely loved monarch of whom history has any record.

Much more credible is the possibility of suicide. The Stoics approved of suicide if there was no other way in which a man could keep his integrity or his sense of decency, these being essential, in their view, to real living. In addition, a man might take his life if called to this by patriotism, philanthropy, poverty, incurable illness, or the threat of senile decay. Marcus was well aware of this remarkable feature of the Stoic creed, had thought much about it, and had pointedly admitted the legitimacy of suicide. It was permissible to "breathe out one's life if one's gorge has risen at the evil things around" (IX, 11). If men will not let us live a good life it is time "to go out of life, yet not as one who is treated ill" (V, 29). Marcus had, too, all the Stoic horror of dotage. And he was not ignorant of the actual Stoic precedents for suicide, including that of Zeno, the founder, and that of Cleanthes, who, compelled to fast owing to a dangerous ulcer, continued the process after the ulcer was healed, because, as he said, he was halfway on the road to death and to retrace his steps was not worth while. The Cynic school, too, had its Demonax who had perished by self-starvation, not to speak of the melodramatic Peregrinus.

Now, if, in the present case, conscious that he had done his last duty to Rome and had made his last amends for presenting the empire with so disastrous an heir-apparent as Commodus, sickened too of the presence of that youth and weary of his long efforts to amend him, the emperor's "gorge had risen," and, like Cromwell centuries after in his last illness, he was now only anxious to be gone, one thing is certain; he would lock the secret

of his suicide in his breast, and no trace of melodrama would gather, with his consent, around his passing. He would not go out of life "as one who is treated ill." He would kill himself and say nothing.

We have these eight formidable facts to face: (1) That suicide was not only not forbidden by the creed of Marcus, it was definitely recommended on occasion; (2) That Stoic suicides, sometimes martyrdoms, had been frequent during the past century and more; (3) That in the *Meditations*, written for his own use and as a guide to himself, he had briefly discussed and fully allowed its legitimacy; why should he have done so except that he was facing the problem on his own account? (4) That he had once, it is said, threatened suicide in order to bring the senate to terms; (5) That he was doubtless weary enough, and had one poignant cause of disgust and disquiet in the thought that his departure was really desired by some people (? Commodus); (6) That he was approaching his sixties, and that if dotage was to be his fate it might not be far off, or, if not dotage, some weakness of mind and will that might lead to moral compromise and weakness; (7) That in his last week he deprived himself almost wholly of food; (8) That the last days, as recorded by the historians, do not suggest the progress of a disease but a man still clear-headed and resolute; foodless, perhaps, but not plague-smitten or infected. These facts are sufficient to render the theory of suicide probable. Marcus may have thought as his illness came on: "I will not, like the Stoic martyrs of the past, open my veins, but, like Cleanthes, I will hasten to be gone." In that case his death was an instance of at least semi-suicide; and if we accept this view we can be

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sure that there would be as little of theatricality in the conduct of Marcus as there was of hesitation.

And perhaps a last flicker of the speculative spirit may have sprung up now in his breast. "If a man die shall he live again?" He had never been quite sure of the answer; but after death he would be sure—or be at least at rest!

Animula vagula, blandula,  
Hospes comesque corporis . . .  
Quae nunc abibis in loca?  
Pallidula, rigida, nudula.

Hadrian! thou knowest by this time, unless . . .

The theory of semi-suicide is really confirmed by the words of Capitolinus, who, however, writing in the reign of Diocletian, was much further from the events than Dio Cassius. "Being eager to die he refrained from eating and drinking and so aggravated the disease."

It is, of course, possible that Marcus had no appetite. Dio Cassius, as we have seen, reports a speech of 175 in which the Emperor said he was "unable to take food without pain"; on the advice of Galen he was in the habit of taking theriac, a mixture of honey and drugs, and towards the end this was all that he attempted to consume.

It has also been suggested that he was a victim of the Plague, which was still raging in the year of his death and was to revive to new fury a little later. One narrative certainly hints at infection of some sort, and at fear of it on the part of Commodus. This theory does not, of course, altogether exclude the others, but the narratives do not suggest to me a man in the grip of mortal sickness.

On the whole the case looks like one of calm, resolved

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suicide, based on an initial absence of the "will to live" when some possibly slight illness came to him, and fortified by memory of the Stoic principles that he had loved from his boyhood days.

We must never forget that Marcus lived in real fear not of death but of one or another form of senile weakness that might result in a sinning against duty, and that, not many months or years before, he had written to himself: "Thou seest how, at the jarring discord of thy life, . . . thou art driven by sheer weariness to say: 'Tarry not, O Death, lest peradventure I too forget myself'" (IX, 3).

But here is the story as Capitolinus tells it:

He died in the following manner: When he began to grow ill, he summoned his son and besought him first of all not to think lightly of what remained of the war, lest he seem a traitor to the State. And when his son replied that his first desire was good health, he allowed him to do as he wished, only asking him to wait a few days and not leave at once. Then, being eager to die, he refrained from eating or drinking, and so aggravated the disease.

(Two days before his death, it is said, he summoned his friends and expressed the same opinion about his son that Philip expressed about Alexander when he too thought poorly of his son, and added that it grieved him exceedingly to leave a son behind him. For already Commodus had made it clear that he was base and cruel.)

On the sixth day . . . with derision for all human affairs and scorn for death, he said to his friends: "Why do you weep for me, instead of thinking about the pestilence and about death which is the common lot of us all?" And when they were about to retire he groaned and said: "If you now grant me leave to go, I bid you farewell and pass on before." And when he was asked to whom he commended his son he



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replied: "To you, if he prove worthy, and to the immortal gods." The army, when they learned of his sickness, lamented loudly, for they loved him singularly . . .

On the seventh day he was weary and admitted only his son, and even him he at once sent away in fear that he would catch the disease. And when his son had gone, he covered his head as though he wished to sleep and during the night he breathed his last.

And here is Herodian's more detailed account of one of these last speeches of Marcus:

Calling together his friends and as many of his relations as were at hand, and setting his son before them, when all had come together, he raised himself gently on his pallet bed, and began to speak as follows:

"That you should be grieved at seeing me in this state is not surprising, for it is natural to mankind to pity the misfortunes of their kinsfolk, and the calamities which fall under our own eyes call forth greater compassion. But I think that something even more will be forthcoming from you to me; for the consciousness of my feelings towards you has led me to hope for a recompense of goodwill from you. But now the time is well-timed both for me to learn that I have not lavished love and esteem upon you in vain for all these years, and for you by showing your gratitude to prove you are not unmindful of the benefits you have received. You see here my son, whose bringing-up has been in your own hands, just embarking upon the age of manhood and, like a ship amid storm and breakers, in need of those who shall guide the helm, lest in his want of experience of the right course he should be dashed upon the rock of evil habits. Be ye therefore many fathers in the place of me, his one father, taking care of him and giving him the best counsel. For those rulers complete a long course of sovereignty without danger who instil into the heart of their subjects not fear by their cruelty but love by their goodness. For it is not those who serve as slaves under compulsion, but those who are obedient

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from persuasion, that are above suspicion, and continue doing and being done by without any cloak of flattery, and never show restiveness unless driven to it by violence and outrage. And it is difficult to check and put a just limit to our desires when Power is their minister. By giving my son then such advice, and bringing to his memory what he now hears with his own ears, you will render him both for yourselves and all mankind the best of kings, and you will do my memory the greatest of services, and thus alone be enabled to make it immortal."

Dio Cassius reports that in his illness he cried out a verse from an unknown tragedy:

Such is war's disastrous work.

The occasion and the bearing of this remark is not quite clear. But we, with thoughts of the Great War and the League of Nations in our minds, may perhaps see in it a realization on the part of the Salian Priest of Mars that his earlier fealty was an ignoble one in comparison with his later but yet early dedication to the Stoic ideal of the Community of Mankind.

Dio Cassius also reports that when asked by the tribune for the watchword, Marcus said, "Go to the rising sun, for I am setting." As he said the words, thinking of Commodus, did he remember how he too had once been the rising sun of the Roman world, a young Stoic of the pallet bed, it is true, but yet capable of boyish pranks among a flock of sheep? And did he think of the passing of Antoninus, as he had wished to do?

That every word of the above speeches was spoken and exactly in the alleged contexts we cannot be certain. But with our knowledge of the *Meditations* we need not question the substantial accuracy of the historians'

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accounts of the Death of Marcus. For the funeral we return to Capitolinus and, with his words of eulogy addressed to a later emperor, this chapter, and with it our story of the earthly career of Marcus, will close.

*Not even flattery, O Diocletian Augustus, has been able to fashion such an emperor as Marcus with the exception of your Clemency.*

*Such love for him was manifested on the day of the imperial funeral that none thought that men should lament him, since all were sure that he had been lent by the gods and had now returned to them. Finally, before his funeral was held, so many say, the senate and people, not in separate places but sitting together, as was never done before or after, hailed him as a gracious god. . . .*

*It was not enough, indeed, that people of every age, sex, degree and rank in life, gave him all honours given to the gods, but also whosoever failed to keep the Emperor's image in his home, if his fortune were such that he could or should have done so, was deemed guilty of sacrilege. Even to-day statues of Marcus Antoninus stand in many a home among the household gods. Nor were there lacking men who observed that he foretold many things by dreams and were thereby themselves enabled to predict events that did come to pass. Therefore a temple was built for him, priests were appointed, dedicated to the service of the Antonines.*

*Even now he is called a god, which ever has seemed and even now seems right to you, most venerable Emperor Diocletian, who worship him among your divinities, not as you worship the others, but as one apart, and who often say that you desire in life and gentleness, to be such a one as Marcus.*

## AFTER-FAME AND SIGNIFICANCE

MARCUS in his later years constantly reminded himself of the transitoriness of human life and the unreliability and worthlessness of posthumous fame. If the love of fame is "the last infirmity of noble mind," as Milton declared, Marcus had utterly conquered that last infirmity. In his case, however, Fama, impotent as a motive during his life, has at least redeemed in some measure her evil reputation as a goddess. In alliance with Fortuna, another goddess of dubious repute, she has done something like justice to the best of men. During his life Fama spread the story of his virtues, and Fortuna, after his death, saw to it that his *Meditations*, and much of his *Correspondence* with Fronto, were preserved for the delight and profit of posterity.

The way in which the said *Correspondence*, lost for sixteen centuries, was at last recovered in 1815, is a romance in itself. One copy of the manuscript was dismembered in monkish times, bound up with fragments of other classical and Christian documents, and then put to the base or glorious second use of recording the doings of that Council of Chalcedon which, in 451, decided that, whatever Nestorius and Eutyches might allege, Christ had two natures, each perfect and complete, a divine and a human, but compactly united in one person. As some people may be inclined to suggest something of the kind for Marcus, there was perhaps an appropriateness in the use of this manuscript for the

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purpose in question. However that may be, in 1815 began the decipherment of the almost obliterated story of his early manhood.

We do not know how the other and even more valuable work was preserved; the suggestion has been made that the son-in-law of Marcus, Pompeianus, or the son-in-law of Fronto, Victorinus, may have seen to it that this precious relic of the dead, found, I suppose, among the belongings of Marcus in his billet on the Danube or the Save, should not be lost to the world. Copies were doubtless made and eagerly preserved by a few reverers of Marcus, and in the year 350 the first recorded reference to the book occurs.

But the fame of Marcus among the Romans was not dependent, as it has been among the moderns, mainly upon a book. It rested mainly on a tradition handed down with a splendid obstinacy from mouth to mouth, transforming itself from the memory-notes of contemporaries into the pious worship of succeeding thousands of adoring men.

The disastrous reign of Commodus did not obliterate, it probably enhanced by the force of contrast, the strength of the tradition. Moreover, the face of Marcus was unusually familiar, speaking its own gracious message and recalling by association far more than it spoke. The triumphal arch erected in the Capitol in 176 was only one of many such speaking reminders, the bronze equestrian statue of Marcus filially erected by Commodus, was another. As we have heard from Capitolinus, busts of Marcus were multiplied in all respectable households, in much the same way as, perhaps, were copies of his book and, being more durable, they were better

preserved; nay, the very face of Commodus as it lifted itself stupidly for the applauses of the crowd in the amphitheatre after one of his seven hundred and thirty-five victories over gladiators, recalled, not in expression but in features, the face of his father, and with that recall came to some the memory of how, during one of his rare visits to the shows, Marcus would keep his eyes from the brutalities of the arena and direct mind and pen to affairs of state or benevolence. Visual mementoes were supplemented by verbal. Amid the crowd of titles that Commodus heaped upon himself and in part attached to the months of the year—Amazonius, Invictus, Felix, and the rest—his earlier names “Marcus” and “Aurelius” were not forgotten. They were, in fact, to prove not only unforgettable but, in a way, indispensable; for when, in the anarchic years that followed the murder of Commodus, an emperor wished to give something of sanctity and stability to his uneasy rule, he was in the habit of resurrecting those two names and attaching them to his own, though in this connection it is only justice to Pius to attribute some of the sanctity of the Antonine tradition and name to him.

Commodus was followed for a few brief months by the admirable Pertinax, and he for a few brief months by the not admirable Julianus, and he for eighteen years by the vigorous Septimius Severus. The rules of succession were now a chaos, both adoption and descent being, for the most part, replaced by the clamorous choice of the soldiers; but even Severus, powerful and victorious though he was, thought fit to proclaim himself the official son of the saintly emperor, and to give, perhaps in wistful hope of a reformation, the holy names “Marcus

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Aurelius Antoninus" to his eldest son, afterwards known as Caracalla. And the act by which Caracalla equalized conditions between the various provinces of the empire bore the name of the "Antonine Decree," though, by the murder of the last child of Marcus, Caracalla did his best to extinguish the Antonine stock. The stock might count for nothing with him, but the tradition bore a spell, to which Cornificia herself, as she went to her death, paid homage in words pathetically like and unlike those of her father: "'Poor unhappy soul of mine, imprisoned in a vile body, fare forth, be glad, show them that you are a daughter of Marcus, whether they will or no!'" Then she laid aside all the adornments in which she was arrayed, and having composed herself in seemly fashion, severed her veins and died." Such was the last of Cornificia, of her whom Marcus, returning to Lorum, had said, "I find my little lady (she was about two) slightly feverish." After that and the other fitful fevers of life Cornificia now sleeps well, unless there is some ampler ether for such daughters and fathers as she and Marcus.

And still the tradition, reconsecrated by the martyrdom of an Antonine, prevailed. Caracalla's six years of rule were brought to an end by the assassination that was inevitable in "that hell of an half-century," and after a few months of Macrinus, who gave the sacred name to his son, another Marcus Aurelius Antoninus appeared, namely, Heliogabalus, who claimed as son of Caracalla and grandson of Severus the Antonine tradition as a support to his throne. And when he, after his little day of infamy, went to his fate, Marcus Aurelius Alexander succeeded. By him—otherwise Alexander Severus—the

name received its most seemly attachment since the death of Marcus, and Alexander might indeed have proved a second Marcus had he been allowed more than his thirteen years of rule. After he had disappeared from the scene and the chaos had grown wilder yet, the name was still a talisman, and we hear it as late as the Gordians, the elder of whom had designed, after the death of Marcus, an epic poem on the two great Antonines into whose line he had married.

I do not know how much longer, if at all, the Antonine formula of consecration was used. But we recall the fact that emperors received apotheosis, and, in the case of some at least of them and, above all, Marcus, their translation to the skies was sometimes taken seriously by the multitude. Perhaps, as Capitolinus suggests, it was the number of busts of Marcus that, along with the tradition of his saintliness, preserved his cult at least as late as the reign of Diocletian, when, as we were told, he was still worshipped as a household divinity and believed to impart revelations in dreams. That he was regarded with intense interest by Julian the Apostate was only natural; if paganism was to be revived, the saintliest and most exemplary soul of paganism must not be forgotten.

It was in the years when Julian was rising to importance that the first recorded reference to the *Meditations* occurs. And then we lose sight of the book until 900, when Suidas gives quotations from it. Quotations, in fact, are the rule until, in 1558, the first printed copy was issued, based on a manuscript now lost. Translations soon followed, and from that time to now the *Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* have been perhaps the greatest *vade*



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*mecum* of western ethics, or rather of western spiritual culture, the equal at least of the *Imitation of Christ*, and far more important than the documents of the theologians and the treatises of the professors. Frederick the Great, Maximilian of Bavaria, Captain John Smith of Virginia, General Gordon, Arnold Bennett, and innumerable other men have kept their souls alive, and in some cases their conduct gracious, through the friendship of this book.

To-day its fame and its value show no marks of decline; and if, as some people contend, the world will ultimately have a non-theological ethics, the text-book which Marcus compiled as a guide to himself in the years that were running so rapidly out will take a high and perhaps the chief place in the code. Modern reformers, socialistic and other, make hardly any pretence of aiding the spiritual culture of the soul. They are for the most part concerned with the mechanical defects of civilization and with the faults of other parties, and their favourite virtues are *justice* (with a highly personal reference), and *good nature* towards the obviously weak and innocuous. Marcus had emptied his heart of every desire except for goodness and perfection, and his book is thus able to supplement popular ethics where it is almost non-existent. And he does it without the explicit theological sanctions which to-day, whether they are valid or not, are confessedly imperilled. "He was the most pious of men, not because he was a pagan [or a Christian], but because he was an accomplished man. He was the embodiment of human nature, and not of a fixed religion. Whatever may be the religious and philosophical revolutions of the future, his grandeur will not suffer any

reproach, for it rests entirely on that which can never perish—upon excellence of heart.”

Renan is right, but he does not go far enough. Marcus Aurelius had more than excellence of heart at his disposal; he had accepted from the “halting slave,” Epictetus, and from his own living teachers, a specific doctrine whose importance will become more and more apparent as the centuries pass, the doctrine that Humanity is a great mystic unit, that we are a part of it and it a part of us, and that in the service of Humanity our individual lives attain significance. He is, in fact, a Positivist, and though he speaks of “the gods” with reverence, he maintains the same attitude and uses almost the same warm and reverent phrases about “the Universe” and “Nature” as he does about them. We see this in the famous and beautiful passage which ends with a fragment, it is believed, from Aristophanes: “All that is in tune with thee, O Universe, is in tune with me! Nothing that is in due time for thee is too early or too late for me! All things come from thee, subsist in thee, go back to thee. There is one who says, *Dear City of Cecrops!* Wilt thou not say, *O dear City of Zeus?*”

Stoicism, we must remember, was pantheistic, and the question whether pantheism is theism and whether Marcus was therefore a theist is interminable; the facts remain that he felt himself a member of a vast organism called the Universe, the Cosmos, or Nature, and of another organism, more limited but more intimate, called Humanity or the City of God. To the service of this second organism he devoted himself even at the moment when his avowed aim seemed to be the private one of beginning to be a good man.

His chief fault (if we deny, with Dr. Haines, that he was the consistent hater of the Christian sectaries) was the fault then spreading at an ever-increasing rate over the civilized world, the neglect of science. The splendid start made by the Greeks was being forgotten or reversed, and for over a thousand years there were to be no substantial advance in actual knowledge and much sheer retrogression. In particular, Marcus, like the Christians of his time and ever since, did not realize that the defects of mankind, the very sins of men and the lack of reasonableness that he lamented, were the direct result of an animal origin. It is only during recent decades that this knowledge has been acquired; religion still talks of "sin" as if it were an unsolved mystery or only explicable in terms of the treason of an archangel or the eccentricity of an Eve; some day, when the facts have sunk in, the practical inference from them will be drawn, and both optimism and pessimism will be replaced by an intelligent meliorism, and religion, let us hope, will talk more sense than it does to-day. In the time of Marcus, only the Epicureans had the faintest belief in the possibilities of science, and Lucian, the cleverest man among them, instead of seeking to supplement the work of Aristotle and his own Epicurus and Lucretius, devoted his talents to making fun impartially of gods and philosophers, of Alexander, of Peregrinus, and of any other seemingly comic figures that came his way. A brief essay on the Fly is almost his only tribute to the spirit of Science—except the science of Human Psychology.

Marcus, by thus ignoring even the poor Science of his day, missed not only the explanation of the sin and folly of men but lost some sources of pure happiness. In

order to wean his heart from the last hankerings after the world, he often poured contempt upon natural processes, analysing them into their beggarly elements in order to feel how unworthy they were of the thought and attention of a member of the City of God about to be absorbed into the Divine Nature of Things. Once or twice, as we have seen, he discerned a Beauty in these processes; in figs gaping asunder, even in the jaws of a lion opening on their prey; but like other men in possession of a set of dogmas, however fine, he did not often feel the sense of Wonder, the sentiment out of which true Science springs; we rarely "wonder" at anything that fits into our dogmas. Yet perhaps to say this is to do injustice to Marcus. He was too great to be wholly without Wonder. He felt a sense of it in the procreation of the child and in the transformation of food into life, sensation, and strength (X, 2). But, somewhat like Lord Shaftesbury sixteen centuries and a half later, if he felt at times the fascination of Science he turned resolutely away from it to the all-important question of Conduct. What a Semite, what a Puritan he was, on principle! "*Conduct, three fourths of life?*" Conduct, he would have told Matthew Arnold, was ninety-nine-hundredths of life.

Renan calls attention to the other great and kindred failure of Marcus, or rather of the philosophers and the whole civilized world of his time. There was no attempt at popular education; there was only a cultured class eager to read the hand-written manuscripts that were then the chief available literature. The penalty of this neglect was that outside the cultured class a vast sea of superstition was raging, which often broke over the

walls, sometimes even compelling the best and sanest men to connive at such monkey-tricks as those of Alexander of Abonoteichus. With slavery everywhere, any scheme of popular education was probably impossible, yet one feels, in view of the real reforms carried out by the philosophic emperors, that if they had had the time they might have accomplished or at least envisaged even this, giving substance to the remarkable words of Epictetus: "The rulers of the State assert that only the free shall be educated, but God hath said that only the educated shall be free."

It was Auguste Comte who most clearly maintained, and most earnestly supported by the toils of a life, that the world needs both an emotional invigoration and an intellectual illumination; needs, in short, the woman soul and the man soul, or rather a soul compounded of both. "The *heart* states the problem, the *intellect* solves it:" no mere cleverness will ever save the world, and no mere emotionalism. Of what quality was the *intellect* of Marcus? "Had Marcus a great mind?" asks Renan, and replies: "Yes, since he saw into the infinite depths of duty and conscience." He certainly saw as far as most men of his time could see, but he could not anticipate the discoveries of later centuries nor those remedies of centuries later still—remedies both emotional and intellectual—which are still awaited by the world if it is to be made "safe for democracy" and safe from war and destruction.

And yet in saying this, injustice may once again be done. In order to concentrate on the inner aspects of his life I have omitted from this book the real achievements of Marcus Aurelius and the Stoics in the realm of

Roman Law. Indeed, there are some reasons why we should forget them. First, that the Anglo-Saxon peoples have been less influenced by Roman Law than other nations of the West; second, that Christianity, contemporary with the empire of Tiberius and Marcus Aurelius and outlasting it, has tended to absorb the credit that is really due to the Stoics. That credit is enormous. The Stoics may have been utterly ignorant of biological and other science, more ignorant even than the Epicureans who did at least faintly believe in scientific possibilities, and they did not possess the exhilarating conception of *Progress*, except within the narrow limits allowed by the principle of cycles. But though they were not evolutionists, they did at least hold firmly to the saving doctrine that all men were akin and all life akin. Steadily under their influence, the old brutalities of Roman Law disappeared, and even victories over the institution of slavery were achieved, such as Christianity had barely achieved centuries later. It is true that negro slavery, which, later in the world's history, was the supreme crime of the West and was defended or at least excused by nearly all Christians, was not the same thing as slavery in the Roman world, where most slaves were of the white stock of their masters and many of them obviously their superiors. It is also true that Christianity, in the time of Marcus, had its own consolation for the slave; he or she was the equal of the master or mistress before God, however unequal before men. But it is also true that Christianity all down the ages made little or no principled attempt\* to alter for the better the condition of the slave

\* A man might liberate his slaves as a religious act, but slavery was not regarded as unnatural in itself. The Stoics held that it was.

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any more than it made any principled attempt to improve Health and Education: whereas Stoicism, through the great emperors of the second century and the legalists of the second and later, did it consistently, and Marcus Aurelius, in particular, strove to this end by every means in his power.

The story has been outlined by Renan in the second chapter of his rather misnamed book. "The Roman Law had a less clamorous triumph than Christianity but in a sense a more durable one." The very phrases which, long centuries later, became the battle-cries of three revolutions, English, American, and French, were derived from the Stoics; Seneca's dictum that "all men, if we go back to the origin of things, have gods for fathers," passing into Ulpian's, "By the law of nature, all men are born free and equal." Slavery was thus admitted to be really contrary to the law of nature. And these phrases did not remain phrases. "It was to the slaves especially that Antoninus and Marcus Aurelius showed themselves beneficent. Some of the greatest monstrosities of slavery were corrected." The slave obtained rights, became a somebody, could resort to the tribunals, could have property and family of his own, could not be sold separately from his family. The male slave was as far as possible saved from the arena and the female slave from the brothel. "Enfranchisement was favoured in every way, [and] Marcus went further and recognized within limits the rights of slaves to the goods of the master."

The victims of the arena could not be wholly saved from it, but Marcus could not forget them. With great moral courage he definitely showed his dislike of the

whole thing. He could not always refuse to be present, but he ostentatiously brought work with him and busied himself with it during the spectacles.

And though he toiled for the manumission of slaves, he had no sympathy with those popular demonstrations which would liberate a slave merely because he had put up a good show in the amphitheatre. "This man has done nothing worthy of liberation," he said tartly on one occasion, facing unpopularity in a way unknown to most of our modern kings and statesmen. "The only people who did not love him were the *habitués* of the amphitheatre."

That he who had long before his death conquered the last infirmity of noble mind, the love of Fame, should also have conquered the greatest infirmity of the mediocre mind, the love of Popularity and Safety First, was only to be expected. And with Marcus what we expect we generally find; he was single, through and through; "Verissimus."

It is said, though hard to believe, that blunted weapons were used in the amphitheatre as the result of his influence. Even the widespread reverence felt for him would not, I suspect, have brought about such a revolution; presumably criminals, at any rate, had still to face and to use weapons that would draw the blood that the populace craved. Better established is the statement that as late as the reign of Diocletian, when Capitolinus wrote and Marcus was still esteemed as a god, a net was spread beneath the rope-dancers. So abiding was his influence that that little concession to humanity, introduced by him after a boy acrobat had fallen and been killed, had never been revoked. "It was a curious fact,"



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says Lecky, "that this precaution, which no Christian nation has adopted, continued in force during more than a century of the worst period of the Roman Empire, when the blood of captives was poured out like water in the Colosseum." By the time of St. Chrysostom it had been abolished, at least in the East. The Christians played their honourable part in humanizing the amphitheatre, but Marcus fought the battle of humanity two hundred years before Telemachus raised his protest and perished in raising it; and, if we want a symbol for the life work of our hero, that outspread net may serve as well as any. Marcus had done what he could.

"*Love human-kind*," he had bidden himself (VII, 31). "*Life is short. This only is the harvest of earthly existence, a righteous disposition and social acts. Save men*" (VI, 30). His net, the jest and scorn, doubtless, of all the hardened *habitués* of the sports, was a humble but authentic witness that there had lived on the earth a would-be Saviour of Men.

## THE SAVIOUR

"SAVE MEN." There have been multitudes of people who have never been engaged, even to a small or occasional extent, on this task; who have, perhaps, never heard the call to it, or, hearing it, have remained indifferent, or have actively employed their faculties in futility or destruction rather than "Salvation." There have been others who, when they perform a "saving" act, do so because convention, or at best an easy good nature, prescribes it, and who, if these prescribed the opposite, would obey with almost equal readiness. There are yet others, inside and outside the churches and religions, who have received the direction of their lives from some such experience as came alike to the Buddha, to St. Paul, and to Marcus Aurelius, when

. . with a rush the intolerable craving  
 Shiver[ed] throughout [them] like a trumpet call:  
 Oh to save [men]! to perish for their saving,  
 Die for their life, be offered for them all!\*

Such folk may become the Howards, the Wilberforces, or the Florence Nightingales of their age, or may perform, in silence and obscurity, tasks as noble and as numerous as those that have brought fame to acknowledged philanthropists, having sought to

"Go on from social act to social act": to

"Dovetail one good act on to another so as not to leave the smallest gap between":

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\* St. Paul: Myers.

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Perhaps achieving that most difficult of all "social acts," the sheer enduring of "*the busybody, the thankless, the overbearing, the treacherous, the envious, the unneighbourly,*" folk who unhappily "know not good from evil."

There have been and there are such men; Marcus Aurelius was one. How such superb goodness first came into a world of matter and brute instinct is one of the fundamental controversies of science, philosophy, and religion. That the higher animals show much mother-love and a little father-love is true, but that there could emerge a still more rarefied beneficence, divorced from every trace of self, every thought of worldly or other-worldly fear or advantage, and that this could grow to a life-purpose controlling every activity of the soul, is a fact that may come to function some day as the single string in the broken harp of Watts's picture and to "save" men from despair.

But there is perhaps a still higher stage of spiritual refinement, and Marcus attained it. The busy, earnest "Saviour" of men, the assiduous Dovetailer of one good act on to another, has his discouragements. The lusts and obstinacies around him remain all too little affected by his efforts; hard though he tries to scan the world for traces of goodness (often finding them, as Marcus did, in surprising quarters) the net result is disappointment. Mankind in general and the people around him in particular, though they possess blessedly redeeming qualities, do not seem to be keeping in step with him and to be advancing like a conquering army upon the citadel of evil. The best men show surprising lapses, and, what is, if not sadder, at least more arresting, the Crusader of Salvation, the Dovetailer of Good Deeds,

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may be sneered at or slandered or opposed, so that in the end he begins to question the outcome if not to doubt the value and genuineness of his own work. Let *others* do a little more of the Crusading and Dovetailing; let the earth if not the heavens show us a "sign" or give us encouragement; this Duty Business needs more recruits; as for me . . . !

But Marcus will not relax, whatever the foes without and the foes within. Though he cannot "save mankind" as he would like, though some strange adversary seems ever at work sowing tares among the wheat, he realizes that there is one tiny field which he can unquestionably "save" from moral destruction if he will. It is very close to him as it is close to every man; so close that the would-be Saviour of others may overlook it as he scans the baleful scene of the wider world; but fortunately it is a field where some success seems really possible to the assiduous. "*Let any say or do what he will, I must for my part be good.*"

Christ, of course, with a mind fuller of vivid metaphors than the mind of Marcus, had said much the same thing, and Voltaire, not wholly in mockery, had found a formula for an aspect of it. Men must cultivate their own gardens as well as Save the World. Perhaps, indeed, this task should take precedence of the other in importance if not in time. The marvel, the mystery of goodness may seem more authentic when a man *is* good than when he *does* good; the doing of good can be more easily and more fraudulently imitated than the other thing.

In the strange metaphor of the "salt" Christ expressed something of this aspect of life. He had conceived of a community of people who, refusing the common com-

promises, should become not only the light of the world, through the witness of their good deeds, but the salt of the earth by the even subtler operation of their characters. They would "*be good*," be a new, changed, reborn race. To them in their new and changed and reborn condition all the ordinary lusts would make no appeal; they would feel an utter detachment from the desire for wealth, being in fact "*poor—in spirit*"; from the desire for a good time, being engaged in "*mourning*" for their own faults or for the sufferings of others; the desire for power would be replaced by a strange "*meekness*"; and all the other common desires would die out in the presence not of some sedate and respectable "*wish*" to be decent, but of a positive "*hunger and thirst*" after righteousness, a willingness, nay a fiery eagerness, to "*seek first*" the Kingdom of God. Such men might, if not too few, become a noteworthy element in any society that contained them, a light shining in its midst, a salt preservative of precious things, perhaps even a leaven producing momentous changes. Whether, as some writers think, Christ had the Jewish nation in his mind as he uttered these words, the Jews being the world's alleged light, salt, and leaven, though sadly deteriorating and already on the point of replacement, or whether the reference is straight-away to the little group he is addressing, is a question beyond my determination. But one is inclined to infer that he was, in fact, addressing a group, not laying down laws for the many or recalling a whole nation to itself. You and I, reader, ordinary unregenerate men, members of the multitude, may not be called upon to "*turn the other cheek*," or give up our cloak in addition to our coat, and the rest. But if we choose to be Christians and

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to believe—not pretend to believe—that there is a real Heavenly Father controlling all things and to regard the Beatitudes as deductions from that belief, in that case such extravagant acts will seem natural; there will be, for us eccentrics, a pretty complete reversal of ordinary behaviour:

Blessed are the poor—in spirit:

Blessed are they that mourn:

Blessed are the meek:

Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness:

—a very uncommon hunger and thirst.

Such people, not you and I and the multitude, will constitute the salt, the leaven, that the earth needs. Even a little salt, a little leaven, may go a long way.

Whether, as the months went on, this extraordinary programme, announced on the hill where, centuries later, Saladin and the Crusaders were to struggle in their Battle of Hattin, with its capture of the fragment of the True Cross and its other incredibly ironic episodes—whether this programme became complicated and confused by messianic, eschatological, and even catastrophic elements, and, if so, whether these are traceable to Christ himself or to the mishearing of his disciples, these are, of course, searching questions for the intelligent theologian of to-day, questions, too, rarely mooted from the public pulpit. It is quite certain that the early Church expected from the first, or almost the first, an early return of Christ from those skies into which he was believed to have vanished. It is obvious, therefore, that a mistake was made at one point or another. But whether there was a big mistake in the *Beatitudes* is not so certain.

If the Beatitudes had come the way of Marcus Aurelius

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he would have said there was no mistake, and would have marvelled more than ever over those Christians, who, though not exactly so "meek" as they might be, yet showed that a sort of "hunger and thirst" dwelt in them. Such folk deserved a little study, though they might not be equal to Epictetus or Demonax.

Certainly the presence in society of a few people absolutely resolved to put first things first would not only exert an influence upon other men, "making bad men good and good men very good," as was said of Marcus, but would be decisive in many a crisis of the world's fortunes. Often it is because, when the balance is wavering, some one man fails in his duty, fails to act or speak or plainly protest, that disaster after disaster descends upon mankind. A little more "hunger and thirst after righteousness," . . . a little salt, a little leaven, . . . each man doing his *own* duty. . . .

If, during a certain fateful week in 1870, one man with moral courage had been at the council of cowards who surrounded Napoleon III, the Franco-German War would probably not have taken place. If, in the next year, such a man had been at the German council board, the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, fatal to future peace, would possibly have been prevented. And so of 1914, and 1919; if at this critical moment or that, or perhaps at some moment not obviously critical, the prides, lusts, fears, or sloths of men had been openly, indignantly, or even perhaps silently opposed, disaster after disaster might have been spared the world.

This factor of personal responsibility is not, of course, the whole story of the tragedy of man. The protestor may in some cases have to die for his cause, as Christ

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apparently came to realize in the dark intuition of his later months. But the earlier intuitions of the Beatitude period, if they were ever true for us, may be still true. We may not be called upon to die for our convictions, or to act out the whole programme of the Sermon on the Mount, but it may be well, it may be the one vital thing in our lives, for us to express, when such is our plain duty, such convictions of ours as have a bearing. Perhaps, feeble folk though we are, our *one* conviction, our solitary point of honour, will "save men." To hunger and thirst after righteousness, to seek first the Kingdom of God, may not, in the eyes of most men, be our daily habit, but we can make our stand on those rare occasions when, as we feel, our solitary vision is our one equipment and treasure and the one thing that the moment demands. Such witnessing may prove supremely good business for the world if not for the witnesser. It is well for light to shine now and then among men stumbling in the gloom; it is good for a little salt to keep corruption at bay. "*Let any say or do what he will, I must for my part be good.*"

I am no panegyrist of religion, but if organized religion meant exactly this, if it meant the existence of such a body of men as would put first things first (which does not mean putting their own things or even their own opinions first) it would be the most blessed and the most practical institution in the world. The loss of the sense of personal responsibility is admittedly one of the chief troubles of democracy, as Plato predicted two thousand years ago; in the end it may destroy democracy and bring tyranny back. But it is also the trouble in other fields, and it has well fortified itself among us, and it possesses strange compensatory and consolatory devices at its command,



above all, the magnificent devices of Hypocrisy and Censoriousness and Vicarious Virtue. *Let yonder men be good, or at least better than they are!*

If we ourselves refuse to do our individual duty, we at least make up for this neglect by urging others to do theirs; we even feel indignant at their crimes, faults, and omissions. And so, too, with men in the mass. Every profession and every nation seems more acutely conscious of the duties that other institutions and other nations should perform than of the duties that lie to hand, and the consciousness works miracles of mischief. Hypocrisy of this kind, the dearest failing of men not grossly vicious, is perhaps in the end the most fatal of all failings, the chief obstacle to human progress, and the chief cause why things go so badly; it is the Master Excuse for neglecting duty; and for this very reason, it received from Christ the greatest of his condemnations. Loving Vicarious Virtue men refuse their own cross, and meanwhile a mote will be magnified even to a beam if it is in another's eye, this magnification being achieved by the process of squinting around the huge beam of moral failure that blocks one's own. There is really no hope for men until they are sincere.

We can even sentimentalize over the failure of beings who, though once ourselves, are ourselves no longer and can therefore be condemned with utter safety; we may lament, for example, the sins of our youth and our ingratitude to our parents, and may think that our sentimental remorse possesses some saving virtue. It possesses none. It is a new indulgence, a new sin, the addition of Hypocrisy to our already heavy load,—*unless here and now we are making very practical amends for these lamented*

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*failures*. Whatever the sins of others or the past sins of oneself, "*I must for my part be good.*"

Marcus was under no delusion on this point. His eyes, deliberately searching the characters of other men in order to discover excellence rather than failure, searched his own character in order to discover present failure and to achieve present excellence. Implicitly, therefore, he is the greatest foe of hypocrisy among all the great moralists, and at first sight it is strange that not from him has come the most scathing, one might almost say the classical and definitive, denunciation of this vice. "Ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If *we* had been in the days of our fathers . . ."; the whole tremendous impeachment should be compared with the pensive forbearances of Marcus. True, Christ was speaking in public, and Marcus, in the *Meditations*, is writing to himself; yet I think it is clear that his restraint and perhaps his forgiveness would reach even to the hypocrite; faithful to the Socratic principle that vice is ultimately ignorance, he refuses denunciation even here; his task is not to denounce others but to "be good."

Why was he less fiery than Christ on this topic? Was it because, almost born to the purple and ruling through long years and without opposition the most important empire on the earth, indignations generated by suppression and deprivation could not very readily rise in his heart? Our own righteous angers, our own sense of human insincerity and imposture, spring mostly from tense and perhaps tragic personal experiences. So it must have been with Christ, and His reactions to Family and Pharisaism would tell their own story even if the

## Marcus Aurelius

narrative part of the Gospels had been absent. His year or two of eager effort to establish on earth a Kingdom of God in face of the coldness of relatives and the malignancy of professional theologians is in no way comparable with the half-century of the Travail of Marcus, Lord of the World, already surrounded by friends and philosophers keener to listen than to object, and in possession of a happy family life until, at any rate, the coming of the Omen of Commodus. Only once, perhaps, was that busy but serene life ruffled by indignation. We hear of a threat to commit suicide if the senate did not come to reason, and we would give a good deal to picture Marcus in that angry mood—if he was angry!

I am not praising him at the expense of Christ. I love Christ's anger with his relatives and with the Pharisees as I love the story of his Temptation in the Wilderness; I love them for the very reason that makes the Church dislike, avoid, and in the end misunderstand them. These stories help to preserve the credibility of the narrative, supply the human touch, and make Christ intelligible in spite of the efforts of Church Councils, at Chalcedon and elsewhere, to do the opposite. But if, as Christ himself held, an angerless benignity towards all men, good and bad, is the hall-mark of the divine, Marcus possessed this, Marcus, the tension of whose mind seems never, unless on that one problematic occasion, to have snapped. Was that well, after all? It is arguable.

But the greatest of the moral achievements of Marcus was not his conquest of anger but that, like Christ, he held that virtue must begin at home, with our own sinful hearts, and ever return there. "*Let any say or do what he will, I must for my part be good.*"

## *The Saviour*

The way of spiritual life is, according to Christ, to Love God and to Love Men. What does the former command mean? It may just mean, if we examine it, to love whatsoever things are good and lovely and true, to love them actively and not in word only or pretence. If the Christian thinks it means other than that, he is, in all probability, an idolator; he is picturing God in the form of some Raphael-presentation of paternal benevolence and beard, seated upon a celestial cloud-bank. And to Love Men? That means to help men, casting away distinctions of *he* and *thou* and *I*.

By some miracle of coincidence the two laws are summed up in two neighbouring parables, the Talents and the Judgment of All Nations. By a still more remarkable miracle, this time of the Spirit, the summons to Aim High and to Help Men, to Love God and to Love one's Neighbour, is also expressed in the compact formula of Marcus Aurelius that stands on the title-page of this book. The harvest of earthly existence is "a righteous disposition and social acts."

Life is far too short for either task, but the moral majesty of Marcus Aurelius is revealed in the fact that he never lost sight of either the First and Great Commandment or of the Second that is Like Unto It. Most good men have forgotten the one or the other.

I have named this last chapter "The Saviour," in deliberate ambiguity. And in bringing my book to a close I wish to suggest that there is, in very truth, a fascinating ambiguity awaiting our exploration.

If the sacerdotal head-dress of the busts of Marcus, and the stiff curls of the high reliefs, could be taken away,

of whose face, reader, would you think? Or, as you are already sophisticated on the matter, of whose face, do you imagine, would the common man or woman think? Unless I am fancying a resemblance where none exists, it would be the face of Christ.

The name "Saviour" was familiar to the pagan world. The cult of the God of Health and Healing, Aesculapius, was the cult of a "Salvator," and there were sundry other cults which offered "Salvation" of this kind or that. Marcus, too, as we have seen, deliberately sought to "save men," and in point of fact saved many men and women from death or misery, and has, for hundreds of years, saved others from spiritual stagnation or despair. I hope that this book of mine will help to extend the use of the words "Saviour" and "Salvation." Florence Nightingale held that the extension was desirable: "These men are Saviours," she said, referring to the inspired benefactors of humanity, in all of whom she saw that there was divinity—unless the word "divinity" had no real meaning.

We noted in brief summary\* the opinion of the Council of Chalcedon on that difficult theological topic; plainly there are curious aspects of this question, and after a further brief discussion of them I shall conclude this book.

Vespasian, we are told, jested on his death-bed, saying that he already felt he was becoming a god (*Vae! puto deus fio!*) like the emperors before him.

Marcus Aurelius may have smiled, amid his speculations about the existence of the gods,† when he reflected that his own apotheosis was not far off. History, as we

\* P. 259.

† *Meditations*, XII, 28.

shall see, made his posthumous godship more real than that of other emperors. "Even now," said Capitolinus, writing a century afterwards, "even now he is called a god, which ever has seemed and even now seems right to you, most venerable emperor Diocletian, who worship him among your divinities not as you worship the others but as one apart, and who often say that you desire, in life and gentleness, to be such a one as Marcus."

Would the smile I have attributed to Marcus have passed into the sardonic if he had known that his own portrait-busts, preserved in pious households to the time of Diocletian and later, might some day recall the alleged features of the Jewish peasant rabbi who had been condemned to the cross as a disturber and been apotheosized by his followers? For that, I suggest, is what really happened, though I have no evidence for it except the speaking testimony of the busts themselves in their resemblance to the modern pictures of Christ.

An inner resemblance has not been overlooked by later scholars; nay, they have concluded that Marcus, whose "life and gentleness," as we have seen, was known to the last emperor (except Julian) who upheld the pagan faith, was, on the whole, more Christian than the Christians.

Marcus, as I have said, was never angry, or never more than once; albeit the Lord of Legions and the Conqueror of Barbarians he was as "meek and mild" (to use the words of our baby hymn) as "the historical Christ"; Marcus, indeed, was by far the meeker and milder of the two. The Church, it is true, has tended to conceal the fact of Christ's angers, or to reserve it for Day of Judgment purposes; and except that the painters

## *Marcus Aurelius*

found the Driving of the Traders from the Temple a good subject for an animated composition, rich in muscle and with a suitable architectural background, the impression of meekness and mildness would be universal among all Christians except the few who can read the evangelical records with discerning minds. There are, of course, unforgettable instances of something akin to meekness, if not identical with it, associated with Christ, but he is not a consistently meek figure to those who read his life.

If we seek for consistent meekness and mildness, patience and peacemaking, pardoning of enemies and hungering after righteousness, for the giving of body and mind as a living sacrifice to God and Humanity, and for all the virtues supposed to be most practically representative of Christianity, *plus* those that belong to the citizen and public man, the Great Exemplar is really Marcus. His meekness, patience, and noble singleness of mind through the greater part of sixty years is an achievement as near to the superhuman as any in history. In him the Beatitudes themselves appear again in credible and authentic form; in him their words were made flesh and dwelt among men in Imperial Rome.

I return to the visible portraits, and ask whether in truth there is any historical connection between them and our conventional portrait of Christ? Can it be that in the minds of the early Christians, who had no authoritative portraits of their Master and at first held in suspicion any attempt to represent him in visible form, an image arose, nevertheless, based largely on the many busts of Marcus? For their number, indeed, was legion; Marcus was perhaps the most beportraited personage in

## *The Saviour*

history, whereas Christ was among the least; the assimilation would take place, therefore, wholly in one direction if it took place at all. Marcus, too, was nominally a god, after his death, and historical criticism teaches that gods and goddesses far less authentic than he have left their stamp on traditional Christianity. Such thoughts are worth pursuing, and I suggest that when the chaos of the half-century that followed the death of Commodus had blurred men's memories; when the names of the emperors had become a confusion; when even among the Christians the talk of past persecutions had become largely impersonal and had lost its association (if it had ever possessed it) with those inescapable busts which radiated calm and compassion amid the menace and strife and ambiguity of the times; when the tradition of Marcus, nevertheless, continued among Pagans and Christians alike, as that of at least a supremely good man, and was supplied with concrete points of attachment in those sacred memorials of a former age, an age, it seemed, somewhere near that of Christ—in such circumstances as these, I suggest, it was possible, without deliberate intent and without prescription by authority, for the Christians to have thought of their Master increasingly in terms of the features of Marcus Aurelius which met them everywhere. After all, the portrait of Christ had to take *some* form in the minds and imaginations of Christians.

More centuries passed, artistic power decayed, until, feebly reviving again in the service of the Church, it represented Christ and His mother and His apostles in Byzantine hideousness. More centuries passed, more artistic power came back, and then Christ began to appear



—when He appeared at all as an adult and not as a babe —in the likeness of Marcus Aurelius. Is not that the Christ whom we picture to-day?

There is one other parallel which, almost in fear and trembling, I venture to suggest. After nineteen hundred years the Church still remains unable to explain intelligibly why Christ went to his death. That, after beginning a ministry full of the promise to mankind of spontaneous Joy, He ultimately realized that Death in some form was His duty or His noble privilege, is proved by all the available documents. The only reasons obscurely suggested for this decision are reasons that no great theologian has employed for theological purposes. And I do not suggest that they were identical with the Stoic reasons that weighed with Marcus towards the end, such as the fear that growing years and weariness might lead him to sin against mankind.

But it does seem as if Christ and Marcus, in their attitude towards Death as well as in their attitude towards Life, may have had something noble in common.

Until men, having learnt the lesson of their humble evolutionary origin, shall have elaborated under high leadership an illuminating Doctrine of the Spirit, the Life and Death whether of Marcus or of Christ can never be worthily written. For the present "*Lent by the gods and now returned to them*" seems as valid of Marcus as the Apostles Creed is valid of Christ; neither formula may be scientifically true but I am constrained to accept both or none. There is still less doubt about the other assurance of Capitolinus, which indeed should function amid our discouragements as a Harpstring of Hope,

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## *The Saviour*

that Marcus "*made bad men good and good men very good,*" and we may exultingly infer that what one man has done other men could do. And thus our Single String may seem to swell to an Orchestra as our sad island-world in the midst of the infinities discerns the possibility if not the promise of superb

Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not,  
and of the clouds opening, and showing to eyes, not grosser than those of Caliban, riches of the Spirit ready to drop in rich Salvation upon mankind.\* But such promises would mean nothing to me if I were not an educationist, and as England is to-day adding little or nothing to educational thought, they may mean nothing to my readers.

\* *Tempest*: III, II.



# CHRONOLOGICAL LIST

## OF PUBLIC EVENTS AND PERSONAL RELATIONS DURING THE LIFE OF MARCUS AURELIUS; AND SOME OTHER DATES.

NOTE.—Most of the dates given below can be accepted; a few are (inevitably) uncertain to the extent of two or three years; a few are possibly legendary. Some indication of these variations of reliability are given.

EMPEROR	DATE	EVENTS
AUGUSTUS . . .	27 B.C.	
TIBERIUS . . .	14 A.D.	
CALIGULA . . .	37	
CLAUDIUS . . .	41	
NERO . . .	54	
GALBA . . .	68	
OTHO . . .	69	
VITELLIUS . . .	69	
VESPASIAN . . .	69	
TITUS . . .	79	
DOMITIAN . . .	81	
NERVA . . .	96	
TRAJAN . . .	98	
HADRIAN . . .	117	
	121	(April.) Birth of Marcus Aurelius at Rome. Father dies some months or years after, certainly before 136. (Marcus migrates on death of father to his grandfather's house and thence to his mother's until 138.)
	123 ( <i>circa</i> )	Marcus's only sister, Annia Cornificia, born. (Later married Ummidius Quadratus.)

# Marcus Aurelius

EMPEROR	DATE	EVENTS
HADRIAN ( <i>contd.</i> )	125-7	Hadrian in Italy after his first great empire journey.
	129	Marcus becomes Salian Priest of Mars.
	132-8	Hadrian in Italy after his second great empire journey.
	132-3	Marcus becomes acquainted with Dio-gnetus and professes Stoicism
	135 ( <i>circa</i> )	Marcus assumes the <i>toga virilis</i> .
	136	Hadrian adopts Lucius Verus the elder as his successor. (?) Marcus is betrothed to Fabia Ceionia. He gives up his paternal legacy to his sister and expresses the wish that his mother should do the same.
	138	Death of Lucius Verus the elder. Hadrian adopts Antoninus Pius, who adopts Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus the younger. Marcus migrates to the Emperor's palace, and is made Quaestor. Death of Hadrian at Baiae.
ANTONINUS PIUS	138	Fronto becomes tutor to Marcus Aurelius (probably had tutored him earlier).
	139	Marcus is made Caesar. Coins of 139-40 call him <i>Aurelius Caesar Augusti Filius</i> . Speech of thanks in Senate. Fronto in letter praises Marcus's carefulness over words, and exhorts to greater. Marcus praises a carefulness for "truth."
	140	Justin Martyr's first <i>Apology for the Christians</i> ; explains other religions by devils and threatens the emperor and princes with eternal punishment if they persecute.  Marcus Consul for the first time. Revolt in Britain; contingents of auxiliaries transferred from Britain as a precaution to Germany to build forts near the Neckar frontier.

# Chronological List

EMPEROR	DATE	EVENTS
ANTONINUS PIUS ( <i>contd.</i> )	140 or 141	Death of the Elder Faustina, wife of the Emperor.
	Between 140 and 143	First trial of Herodes Atticus: Marcus pleads with Fronto to be moderate in his prosecution of the accused.
	142-3	War in North Britain under Lollius Urbicus. The Wall of Antoninus (nineteen forts with connecting rampart of turf and clay—thirty-six miles) built from Forth to Clyde.
	143	Marcus keeps holiday at Baiae: writes to Fronto regretting separation from the "most beautiful of souls" ( <i>mea pulcherrima anima</i> ) who is suffering from illness. Correspondence on the question of sincerity in language: Fronto urges that courtesy, too, has its value. Marcus's adventure with the sheep. Fronto Consul.
	145 ( <i>circa</i> )	Lucius Verus assumes the <i>toga virilis</i> and on the same day Antoninus Pius dedicates a temple to Hadrian and gives <i>largesse</i> to the public. Soon afterwards Lucius Verus as Quaestor gives a show seated between Antoninus and Marcus.
	Between 145 and 147	Marcus marries (? 140) the Younger Faustina, his cousin, daughter of Antoninus. Coins show him on one side and her on the other. Illness of Faustina: "an obedient patient." Daughter born and dies. Son born and dies.
	146	Marcus Consul for the second time.
	146-7	Marcus deserts rhetoric for philosophy, to Fronto's disappointment.
ANTONINUS PIUS and MARCUS AURELIUS	147	Marcus is given the Tribunician Power ( <i>Tribunicia Potestas</i> ) and becomes practically Co-Emperor: Consul for the third time. Stone inscription at Smyrna records congratulations on birth of a son to Marcus (see 145-7).

# Marcus Aurelius

EMPEROR	DATE	EVENTS
ANTONINUS PIUS and MARCUS AURELIUS ( <i>contd.</i> )	148	Daughter born to Marcus (Annia Lucilla, who later married Lucius Verus and Pompeianus).
	150	Daughter born to Marcus (Arria Fadilla, who later marries Claudius Severus; their daughter many years later married the one-month Emperor Gordian I).
	152	Lollius Urbicus, <i>Praefectus Urbi</i> , puts some Christians (Ptolemaeus, etc.) to death.
	154	Lucius Verus Consul.
	155	Martyrdom of Polycarp at Smyrna (or 156 or 166).
	155 ( <i>circa</i> )	War in Britain in the neighbourhood of the two walls; northern province perhaps lost. In Germany the Neckar forts and frontier occupied (see 140).
	156 ( <i>circa</i> )	Domitia Lucilla, mother of Marcus, dies.
	159	Daughter born to Marcus (Cornificia, put to death by Caracalla in 215).
	161	Death of Antoninus Pius (March).
	161	Births (August) at Lanuvium of twin princes, Commodus and Antoninus. Coins of 161-2 announce <i>Felicitas Temporum</i> and <i>Concordia Augustorum</i> (Marcus and Lucius are shown with clasped hands). Troubles in Britain and in the Rhine basin continue. The frontier from the Rhine to Dacia is defended by A. Victorinus, C. Pompeianus, and C. Agricola.
MARCUS AURELIUS and LUCIUS VERUS	161-2	<i>Opening of the Parthian War</i> : disaster to Severianus at Elegeia on the Upper Euphrates. Defeat of Cornelianus. Inundation of Tiber (Spring, 161); famine; fires; plague of insects. Earthquake at Cyzicus.
		Fronto implores Marcus, now senior Emperor, to love eloquence.

# Chronological List

EMPEROR	DATE	EVENTS
MARCUS AURELIUS and LUCIUS VERUS (contd.)		Lucius Verus, accompanied by Marcus as far as Capua, starts for the Parthian War: coins announce <i>Profectio Augusti</i> : he falls ill at Canusium, whither Marcus hastens. Later, Lucius "restores discipline" in the army of the East and offers terms to the Parthian King Vologeses, which are rejected.
	162	Fronto protests against the excessive generosity of Marcus in the matter of Matidia's bequest.
	162 or 163	Birth of M. Annius Verus, last son of Marcus.
	163	Lucius Verus, writing to Fronto, has no victories yet to chronicle. Fronto visits the princely twins ("little chicks"). Later in the year Statius Priscus wins victories in Armenia; coins announce <i>Verus Armeniacus</i> . Lucius Verus sends eloquent letter to Senate begging that Marcus also accept the title. Marcus praises Lucius Verus.
	163-6	Victories of Avidius Cassius over the Parthians in Upper and Lower Mesopotamia (see 165).
	164	Coins announce <i>Marcus Armeniacus</i> and <i>Rex Armenicis Datus</i> ("A king given to the Armenians"); in the latter case Lucius Verus is shown giving crown to Sohaemus, instead of Pacorus, the Parthian nominee.
	163 or 164	Marriage of Lucilla, daughter of Marcus, to Lucius Verus. (Bishop Abercius had "cast a devil" out of her!) Lucian of Samosata about this time carries out his dangerous investigation into the impostures of Alexander of Abonoteichus.
	163-7	Condemnation of Justin Martyr and six other Christians at Rome by Rusticus, <i>Praefectus Urbi</i> , about this time.



# Marcus Aurelius

EMPEROR	DATE	EVENTS
MARCUS AURELIUS and LUCIUS VERUS (contd.)	165	Capture of Seleucia and Ctesiphon by Avidius Cassius. Coins announce <i>Verus Parthicus Maximus</i> . Correspondence between Fronto and Lucius Verus with regard to a history of the latter's Parthian achievements. Letter of Fronto to Avidius Cassius. Death of Prince Antoninus. Martyrdom of Sagaris, Bishop of Laodicea. Death of Fronto's wife and one of his grandsons: he impeaches providence in a letter to Marcus.
	166	Faustina during a part of this year is with her daughter Lucilla and Lucius Verus. Birth of Vibia Aurelia Sabina, last child of Marcus. Return of Lucius Verus from the East; coins announce <i>Marcus Parthicus</i> and <i>Pax Augusti</i> . Joint triumph of Marcus and Lucius: sons and daughters of Marcus ride in the triumphal car. At the request of Lucius Verus, the two surviving sons of Marcus (Commodus and Annius Verus) are made Caesars; their effigies appear on coins. Plague introduced by the army returning from the East. Irruption of the northern barbarians, who reach the Adriatic: <i>Beginning of the Marcomannic War</i> : Victorinus and his army annihilated. "End of the Empire" talked about; drastic military measures. Death of Fronto (or in 167). (See also under 155.)
	167	The two Emperors depart for the northern front.
	168	The Marcomanni sue for peace; war with the Quadi and Jazyges continues.
	169	Death of Lucius Verus (Jan.) of a stroke, at Altinum (Adriatic).

# Chronological List

EMPEROR	DATE	EVENTS
MARCUS AURELIUS (alone)	169	<p>Body of Lucius Verus embalmed by Galen and burnt in the Campus Martius; ashes buried in the Tomb of Hadrian. Marcus addresses the Senate on Lucius Verus. Coins announce <i>Divus Verus Conservatio</i>. Death of Prince Annius Verus of tumour under the ear (or in 170).</p> <p>Marcus departs again for the war (Oct.); sale of palace furniture; the <i>Lectisternium</i> in the streets (? 173). Galen appointed doctor to Commodus. Lucilla, widow of Lucius Verus, marries Pompeianus.</p> <p>Spectacular death of the Cynic Peregrinus at Olympia (? 165): Lucian present and later reports the event.</p>
	170	Marcus at Sirmium (Metrovitz). Trial (second) of Herodes Atticus at that place.
	171	Marcus at Carnuntum (Haimburg). The Lions cast into the Danube as prescribed by Alexander of Abonoteichus. Some defeats of the Romans.
	172	Marcus wins a victory and is named on coins, with Commodus, <i>Germanicus</i> . Coins also show him and his army crossing a bridge and bear the legend <i>Germania Subacta</i> ("Germany subdued"). Barbarians allowed to settle in Pannonia, Moesia, and Dacia.
	172-3	War in Spain against the Mauri, in Egypt against the Boukoloi. Avidius Cassius in command in Egypt.
	174	Victory over the Quadi; "Thundering Legion" episode. Victory over the Jazyges on the frozen Danube. Coins show Faustina as "Mother of the Camp" and Commodus as member of the College of Pontifices. Marcus summons Alexander the Platonist to be his Greek secretary.

# Marcus Aurelius

EMPEROR	DATE	EVENTS
MARCUS AURELIUS (contd.)	175	Conquest of the Jazyges (Sarmatians). Marcus is named <i>Sarmaticus</i> and saluted Imperator for the eighth time. <i>Revolt of Avidius Cassius</i> : his "three months (? six months) dream of empire." Commodus assumes the <i>toga virilis</i> , is shown to the soldiers, and is elected leader of the equestrian youth; coins show him as <i>Princeps Juvenutis</i> . He is also made consul (though he should have been thirty-three years old) Marcus addresses the troops on the rebellion and departs for the East with Faustina, Commodus, and Pertinax. Murder of Avidius Cassius; Marcus sends a speech to the Senate on the subject. Death of Faustina at Halala in Cilicia (winter 175-6). She is deified; coins bear the legend <i>Divā Faustina Consecratio</i> .
	176	Marcus, with Commodus, visits Syria, Egypt, Asia Minor, and Greece. Attends lectures, is initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries, and endows chairs of philosophy. Returns to Italy via Brundisium (a storm). Coins announce <i>Fortuna Redux</i> and <i>Adventus Caesaris</i> (i.e. Commodus). Marcus and Commodus celebrate a triumph for victories over Germans and Sarmatians (Dec.); Marcus runs on foot by the side of the chariot of Commodus.
MARCUS AURELIUS and COMMODUS	176	Title of Imperator is conferred on Commodus. Triumphal Arch.
	176-7	Edict against religious extravagances, including, by implication, Christianity.
	177	Commodus is made Augustus: coins show him as having received the Tribunician Power ( <i>Tribunicia Potestas</i> ). Marriage of Commodus to Bruttia Crispina about this time. Persecution of Christians at

## Chronological List

EMPEROR	DATE	EVENTS
MARCUS AURELIUS and COMMODUS ( <i>contd.</i> )		Lyons and Vienne(?). <i>Apologies</i> of Melito and Athenagoras. Marcus attends lectures of Sextus the Boeotian.
	178	Earthquake at Smyrna; Aristides appeals to the two Emperors on behalf of the city, which is rebuilt. Discourse of Marcus on the "Ordo praeceptionum." "Ceremony of the Spear" (or Dart) on the occasion of the two Emperors leaving for the front on the <i>Expediitio Germanica Secunda</i> (Aug.).
	178-80	The Marcomanni and Quadi are gradually overcome and plans are contemplated for making two new provinces beyond the Danube.
	180	Death of Marcus Aurelius on March 17th at either Vindobona (Vienna) or Sirmium (Mitrovitz), probably the former.
COMMODUS . . .	180	
PERTINAX . . .	193	
JULIANUS . . .	193	
SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS	193	
CARACALLA and GETA	211	
CARACALLA . . .	212	
	215	Cornificia, daughter of Marcus Aurelius, put to death.
MACRINUS . . .	217	
HELIOGABALUS . .	218	
ALEXANDER SEVERUS	222	
MAXIMIN . . .	235	
GORDIAN . . .	238	Had married a granddaughter of Marcus Aurelius.
<i>Others</i>		
DIOCLETIAN . . .	284-306	The last persecutor of the Christians. Admirer of Marcus Aurelius.
<i>Others</i>		
JULIAN THE APOSTATE	361-3	The last pagan Emperor. Admirer of Marcus Aurelius.

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